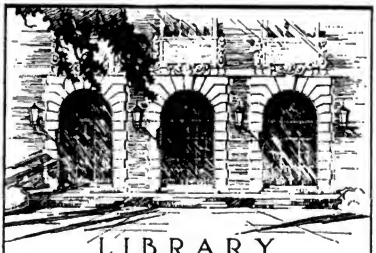
A MAIDEN'S CHOICE

W. Heimburg

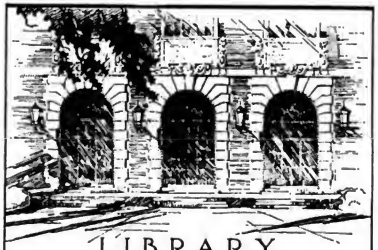
Digitized by Google



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

834B39
0lEl
1899

Digitized by Google



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

834B39
0lEl
1899

Digitized by Google

A MAIDEN'S CHOICE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

A MAIDEN'S CHOICE

BY

W. HEIMBURG

Author of "Lucie's Mistake," "Defiant Hearts," Etc., Etc.

TRANSLATED BY

ÉLISE L. LATHROP

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY, 9 AND 11 EAST SIXTEENTH STREET : : : NEW YORK

1899

Digitized by Google

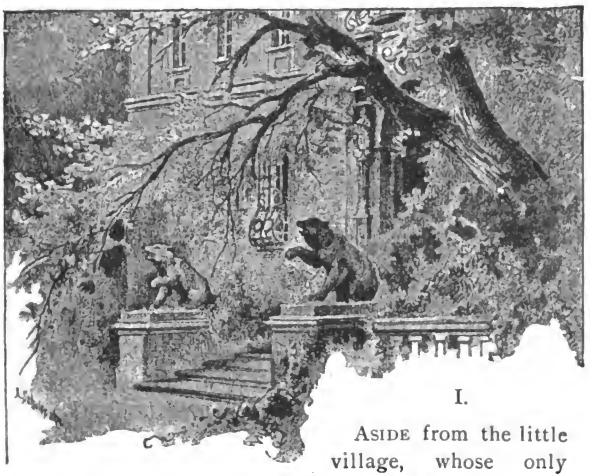
COPYRIGHT, 1891, BY
WORTHINGTON CO.

Microfilm Negative #96-0104
Humanities Preservation Project

Digitized by Google

834B34
OLEL
1899

A MAIDEN'S CHOICE.



I.

ASIDE from the little village, whose only street climbs up from the valley, lies the old Derenberg castle. The park which surrounded it has grown wild; the branches of the trees hang in untrimmed luxuriance over the road, quite blocking the entrance, and in the pleasure-garden flowers grow in gay mixture with all kinds of weeds.

The massive double doors of the high portal are tightly closed, and on the broad steps before them

Digitized by Google

grows greenish moss, as if for years no foot had stepped upon them. At each side of the entrance, a bear, cut in sandstone, keeps guard with defiantly raised paws, and, as if bored, looks down the splendid alley of primeval lindens which leads to the open place before the castle. It is quite strangely quiet around the old castle; only the wind sighs through the trees of the park, and solitude has laid her dreamy spell over this world-removed spot of earth—for a long time already.

And yet there was life here, gay, blooming life. Clear, jubilant child-voices echoed through the lofty corridors, and floating curls and happy child-eyes peeped through the green thicket of the garden. The slender boy with the defiant black eyes, and the delicate girl with the blonde curls, who could scarcely follow her brother with her tripping little feet, how beautiful was youth for them! And at times, a third little head appeared near them with a pair of sunny blue eyes, the dearest playmate of the brother and sister, Lieschen, from the paper-mill down there in the valley, the rag-miller's Lieschen, as she was called in all the village; a name which she accepted as perfectly natural, and smilingly nodded when she was so called.

If the children stood at the windows of the castle, they could see over the green tops of the oaks the stately, slated roof of the mill, and very often they went hand in hand to their little friend. Then they walked along the park wall by the rushing mill-stream, across the small bridge over this, and now the comfortable dwelling-house lay before them; gay pigeons fluttered around its gables, the windows looked so clear, and the stamping of the mill, the rushing water, told of life.

Digitized by Google

And within, in the cosy room, in the so-called nursery, there sat Auntie by the stove and spun; her pleasant eyes smiled at the children, and on the long winter afternoons the little girl hurriedly drew a bench to the feet of the old woman, while Army seated himself near her, his large eyes resting expectantly upon the wrinkled face. "And now tell us something, Auntie," was the clamor, and the old woman told

them stories; the whirr of her spinning-wheel accompanied her voice, and then all, all the fairy-tale forms of the bad wolf and Red Riding Hood, of Snow-white and the seven dwarfs, rose before the eyes of the children, and the girls leaned closely against each other, while the boy clenched his little fists. "If I had only been there I would—I would have killed the wolf!"

But the best of all was up in the castle. There the little feet could run through endless corridors; nowhere

Digitized by Google

else could they play such splendid games of hide and seek as in the many corners, the deep alcoves and niches of the large, arched hall; the gay voices echoed strangely from the lofty walls, and the old white-haired servant often came among the little group, with the whispered words: "Quiet—quiet, so that your grandmamma does not hear you!"

"Grandmamma!" That was a word which would subdue the loudest merriment. Shyly they tripped past the room door of the feared one, in order to seek another place for playing. Sometimes it happened that a commanding woman's figure in dark green walked along the corridor, and met the children; then she would remain standing, and call the grandson to her, and stroke his curly hair: a smile passed over her pale, proud face, and her dark eyes sparkled; she nodded pleasantly to Nelly, while she seemed not to notice the little girl at all, who shyly stood there, and timidly and surprisedly looked up at her.

"No one else has such a beautiful grandmother, that is sure," said the little one, looking after her.

"My mamma is much prettier!" declared Nelly then, and ran in the sitting-room, where a pale young lady sat at the window, and with heavy, tearful eyes looked out into the solitude. But when the children approached her a smile passed over her sad face; she had caresses for each alike, for Lieschen also, and answered unweariedly the many questions which were put to her. At times Sanna, the thin old servant, appeared, and took the boy away, in the midst of the loveliest games, to the grandmother; then he did not return for hours; the little girls must play alone then, and that was not half so nice.

Digitized by Google

Army was grandmama's favorite, her only joy in the quiet life. He must obey the command, and he did it so willingly. He returned with sparkling eyes, and related what grandmamma had told him of the far South, where it was so many thousand times more beautiful than here, where there was a mountain that sent out fire, by the blue sea, and where every one was gay and happy. "I will go there as soon as I am grown," he usually added, "and Liese shall come with me, because she is not afraid in the dark, and does not cry like Nelly."

But it was the greatest delight of the children when old Henry, after much begging, took the heavy bunch of keys, in order to take them to the ancestral hall. There they lay before them, the row of deserted rooms, in the twilight of drawn curtains; a peculiar fragrance such as comes from rose jars, a breath of air which reminded one of long past times, met them, and shyly the children's feet tripped through the rooms, past the high chimney-pieces with their gilded arabesques and foliage, whose black throats seemed to yawn as if bored at the eternal monotony, past massive old four-post bedsteads, whose faded silk hangings rustled softly, as if some one stood behind them.

And then came the most beautiful part of the whole castle, the children's favorite spot, the ancestral hall. There they all looked out of their heavy, gilded frames, the old Derenbergs, with their wives and sons and daughters. What a stately row of proud men and beautiful women! Each of the children had his or her favorite picture there, and Army usually stood before one of the first in the long row, and his large eyes shone as he looked up at the wonderfully beautiful woman's

Digitized by Google

head which stood out, almost as if done in relief, from the dark background. The picture was painted in delicate colors, almost obliterated; luxuriant golden,

almost red hair, drawn back from the white forehead, was hidden under a cap of silver stuff, and below this forehead, under the black, delicately pencilled brows, which contrasted strangely with the bright hair, looked out great dark eyes; with the expression of deep, unfathomable longing they gazed at the spectator, so dreamily, so steeped in misery, as if they sought a lost happiness. The delicate mouth was slightly drawn down; around the slender neck lay a wonderfully set diamond necklace; a dress of silvery stuff, held together on the small, somewhat wasted shoulders by diamond

Digitized by Google

aigrettes, clung tightly to the delicate figure, and from the open sleeves shone a slender white arm.

"That is Agnes Mechthilde, Freifrau of Derenberg," said Army, proudly; "a born Krobitz of the Trauenhouse; she is the most beautiful of all," he added, "but she has long been dead—almost two hundred years."

Lieschen shook her head, so that her brown braids flew out. "Our, your grandmother, who hangs down there, is much more beautiful." And she ran down the long hall and placed herself before the life-size picture of the beautiful Leonora von Derenberg. She was painted in the splendor of a lady of the Middle Ages, in which she had once received the reigning sovereign when he honored Castle Derenberg with his presence, in order to hunt in its extensive forests. And this proud moment was here preserved in the picture. The beautiful, luxuriant figure in the blue velvet gown bent slightly forward in a charming pose. The slender hands held up to the spectator the silver goblet with the welcoming drink; the fine head was bent a little to the side, the black eyes beamed in seductive brilliancy, and the full, smiling lips seemed yet moist from the just-sipped wine. There was an intoxicating breath of voluptuous sensuality about the form of this wonderfully beautiful woman.

"Ah, she is beautiful! she is splendid!" cried Lieschen; and clapped her hands with delight. "The most beautiful of all! and you, Army, look just so!"

"My mamma is still more beautiful," asserted Nelly again; "is she not, Henry?" she asked the old man, who, standing there, looked at the beautiful woman in the picture with a melancholy smile.

"Yes, indeed," he replied, starting out of deep

Digitized by Google

thought, and went to the last picture in the long row and arranged the withered wreath with the black mourning scarf, which did not seem at all suited to the bold, sensual man's face which looked out from beneath it.

"That is my father," whispered little Nelly, following the old man, and nestling against him. "You knew him, too, Henry, did you not? He was so handsome, mamma says, and she loved him so, and he died so young. Mamma cries so much for him every day, still."

"Yes, yes; she cries every day," replied the old man, and in his eyes sadness and anger shone at once; "every day—and God knows she has reason," he added softly.

And one day the playing of the three was at an end; the pretty boy went away from the lonely old castle. He should enter the cadet school in order to become an officer some day; "the only respectable career for a poor nobleman," grandmamma had said, with a bitter smile.

He ran once more to all the favorite places in the old park; he took leave of the ancestral hall, and the beautiful Agnes Mechthilde; and then he also went to the mill. "God protect you!" said Auntie, with emotion, and stroked his curly head; and Lieschen walked a little way with him, to before the house. At the mill bridge she remained standing.

"Good-bye, Lieschen," said he, and when the little one suddenly put her hands before her face and began to weep bitterly he looked quite surprised. "Please do not cry, Lieschen," he consoled her, with embarrassment. "I shall come back again at vacation time, and

Digitized by Google

will bring you something. And Nelly stays here; you must go to see her every day."

Lieschen shook her head. "I am afraid of your grandmother when you are not there; she always looks at me so angrily."

He laughed. "You are foolish, Lieschen. Good-bye; give me your hand, and do not cry any more."

She stretched out her hand, but with the other arm

she brushed against the railing of the little bridge, laid her head down on it, and wept still more. It sounded

Digitized by Google

quite heart-broken, and Army could see only the brown hair and the two long, splendid braids, which he so liked to use as reins when they played horse.

"Good-bye, Lieschen," he said once more, softly; it suddenly seemed fearfully hard to him to go away from here, although he had so looked forward to being with boys of his own age. "Good-bye," sobbed Lieschen, and when, after a long while, she looked up, the playmate had disappeared, and she went in to Auntie and cried herself out,—the first hot tears of parting in her little life.

Digitized by Google

II.

In the room of the younger baroness a wood fire crackled in the tall chimney, and lent the room with the old carved furniture a somewhat cosy, homelike look. In one of the deep window niches sits a young girl of scarcely fourteen years, and looks at the fading sunset of the short winter day; her fine profile stands out sharply against the light background of the window. She has folded her slender hands in each other, and her thoughts evidently wandered into the distance.

"Mamma!" said she then, and suddenly turned her head, with the thick blonde curls, to the delicate, pale woman who was knitting in an arm-chair by the fire. "Mamma, Army is staying an unreasonably long time in grandmamma's room; we will again to-day not have time to go to the mill, and yet it is the highest time. Army has only eight days' furlough, and already four have passed. To-day he promised me decidedly to come with me. What will Lieschen think, when he has not been down there once?"

The young girl had risen with these words, and had approached her mother; an expression of displeasure and impatience lay on her childish face.

"Only have patience, Nelly," replied the mother, and stroked her daughter's blooming cheeks. "You know, when grandmamma wishes, Army must stay as long as

Digitized by Google

she desires. Grandmamma has many things to say to him. Practise patience, my darling. It is so necessary for life. Light the lamp and draw the curtains

You know there is yet much to be done to finish Army's linen. Be industrious, little daughter, then time passes the quickest."

The slender, girlish form, with its still childish out-

Digitized by Google

lines, glided almost noiselessly over the inlaid floor, and soon the lamp illuminated the room, which now seemed doubly homelike, with its old-fashioned and yet such comfortable furnishings. The baroness also rose and took a seat beside the large round table, and now the lamp-light fell upon a pale face, with indescribably attractive, gentle features; but grief had furrowed many lines of pain in it, and the thoughtful blue eyes one saw had wept very, very much.

The little daughter opposite had her features at this moment; the blue, starry eyes shone out gladly from under thick, long lashes, for without, in the corridor, was heard a firm, elastic step. Immediately the door of the room opened, and a gay young officer entered. His nineteen-year-old face wore an expression of the sunniest youthful courage, and his dark eyes had a laughing, happy look. Nelly hurried up to him.

"Army, how nice that you come! Now we can surely go to the mill," begged she, and, rising on tiptoes, threw her arm caressingly round his neck. "I will get my cloak and cap quickly, for we must not wait longer. You know they have supper punctually in the mill."

She was about to hurry happily away.

"Stop, Nelly!" cried the young man, and held her by the arm. "Let that go, little one; it—is no longer suitable," he added, hesitatingly.

"It is no longer suitable?" The young girl looked up at her brother questioningly.

"No, Nelly; you must be sensible. As a child, one can associate with whom one will, just because one is a child, but an officer does not now go——"

"But to Lieschen! You can surely visit Lieschen? You always used to come with me so willingly."

Digitized by Google

"Oh, Army!" said the baroness; "you are not serious. They are honorable people, those of the mill, and they have always meant well with you. It would be unthankful——"

"But, mamma, I beg you," replied he, and his dark eyes sparkled with vexation. "It really is not possible for me to go there. The people are honorable, certainly, but of the lower middle class. Only think, suppose the miller should go to B——, and should have the unfortunate idea of looking me up! I should be placed in the greatest embarrassment!"

"They are no uncultivated people, and only grandmamma, who cannot bear the miller's family, has told you that," cried Nelly, and her little face flamed.

"Miller's! That is it," laughed the young officer. "No, my little one," he added, and seated himself at the table. "You do not understand that. I admit that they are respectable, good people, but to pay them a visit I must cross a wide chasm, and it is not well to build a bridge over it. Let every one stay in his own rank. You, too, Nell, cannot always associate with them over there. When your first long dress rustles behind you, then good-bye rag-miller's Lieschen!"

"Never!" cried the young girl, beside herself. "I will run to the mill at night if they forbid me to by day. Lieschen is my only friend. But what shall I tell her as a reason why you do not come?" She burst into tears.

"A reason can be found. Nelly, pray do not cry," said her brother, consolingly. His voice had a gentle sound, just as formerly, when he had broken his sister's doll and did not know how he could comfort her.

She knew this time; she raised her little head, and

Digitized by Google

her blue eyes, sparkling with tears, looked up at him hopefully. "Oh, Army," begged she, "you wished to tease me, did you not? We will go to the mill, eh?"

He stood there motionless for a moment; before his mind rose the well-known figure of a little girl as he had formerly seen her a hundred times—Lieschen, ragmiller's Lieschen, from the paper mill down there in the valley. She looked at him with her sunny blue child eyes, her red lips opened: "Army, are you coming with me? We will go to Auntie; she will give us apples, and I saw a bird-nest in the park. Come, Army, come!" Mechanically he made a gesture as if he would seize the cap which lay on the table. The lamplight fell on a sparkling ring on his hand, in whose golden green stone shone the bear coat-of-arms of the Derenbergs; hastily he glanced at the same, and quickly seized his cap and threw it on a near table.

"Do not worry me!" said he shortly, and turned away.

A long pause ensued; the young girl rose and seated herself at her former place, bending her head deeply over her work; but the little fingers which guided the needle trembled violently, and great drops fell from her eyes on the white stuff. The baroness sighed and rested her eyes with a pained expression upon her son, who continuously walked up and down the room. The old rococo clock struck six and began to play a long-forgotten love-song; the fine, delicate melody echoed through the room, and still the silence of displeasure lay over the three people, who were yet bound together by the tenderest love.

"Army," at length began the pale lady, "when did

Digitized by Google

grandmamma give you the ring which you now wear on your finger?"

He stood before the fireplace, and while he poked the tongs in the blaze, so that the sparks shot high up, he said:

"This afternoon, just now, when I was in her room."

"Do you know that it is your father's ring, Army?"

The young man suddenly turned round. "No, mamma, grandmamma did not tell me that; she only spoke in general of the signification of the coat-of-arms, and——"

"Well, my child, I will tell you," came from the lips of the baroness, and it seemed as if her voice trembled with inward excitement. "It is the ring which grandmamma once drew from the cold, stiff hand of your father, when he—was dead." The last words sounded like a half-suppressed cry, and the delicate form sank back in the arm-chair as if broken.

"My dear, good mamma!" cried Army, and quickly knelt down by her side, while Nelly, bending over her, leaned her cheek against her tearful face.

"Do not cry, dear mamma!" begged he. "I will honor the ring as highly as only a son who is proud of the remembrance of his father may. I will try to be as good, as noble as he was."

In these words, in the look which he gave his weeping mother, lay all the conviction of an unspoiled, childish heart, all the reverence which sees in the deceased father the best of men. But the effect of his words was almost annihilating. The fragile form of the baroness drew itself up from the chair; she looked at her son as if out of her mind. "Army, almighty God!" she cried, in a tone of desperation. "Oh, not that! not that!"

Digitized by Google

"Mamma is ill," said the son, and hurried to the bell. But a weak "Come back, Army! It will pass," called him back to her side. She thankfully took a glass of water, and said, while she tried to smile:

"I have frightened you, you poor children; forgive me. The recollection of your father is for me even to-day a deeply sad one, but now when Army is about to enter the world, I must speak to you of the past, which until now I have always sought to avoid. You have already, probably, secretly wondered," she continued, after a short pause, "that we lead such a simple, retired life—a life which is totally without luxury. Ah, Amry, it does not pain me on my account, only on yours. You enter into the most depressing circumstances which one can imagine, conjured up by the boundless frivolity——"

She hushed, frightened, and burst into bitter weeping.

Army stood near the fireplace, with gloomy brow, and looked over at the weeping woman. The sunny expression of his face was as if wiped away, and about his mouth lay an expression of deep disappointment.

"When I entered this house at your father's side, a child of just sixteen years," began the baroness again, "I found here brilliancy and gay life. Castle Derenberg had been renowned for its hospitality for years, and your grandmother knew how to maintain an establishment. She was, at that time, still wonderfully beautiful, just as entrancing as in her large picture upstairs in the ancestral hall, and she loved brilliancy and splendor. She was so good and loving to me that I really thought I had found a second mother. Ah, that short, brilliant time was the most beautiful of my life; and when I clasped you to my heart, my Army,

Digitized by Google

and you, my Nelly, nothing was lacking for my happiness. But then came the dreadful catastrophe, the

death of your father. Suddenly and abruptly unhappiness burst over us."

She shuddered, and pressed her trembling hands to her temples, as if she must think whether what she related really belonged to a distant past, while the young girl, sobbing softly, knelt before her mother.

"After his death, a guardian was given me in the person of the lawyer Hellwig. It was found that our affairs were more than disordered. Wherever the eye

Digitized by Google

turned, mortgages, loans, unpaid bills; it was a confusion beyond comparison in which grandmamma and I suddenly saw ourselves placed. How many sleepless nights, how many hours of trouble have passed since then! and yet, up to this day, old Hellwig, in spite of his exertions, has not brought light out of the chaos; it is all too confused, too disarranged."

"Do not excite yourself, dear mamma!" begged the young officer. "I knew long ago that we lived in straitened circumstances, even if I could not suspect that we are so poor; but take courage! Other, better times will surely come. Grandmamma told me that affairs were not so desperate, as we could certainly expect a rich inheritance from Aunt Stontheim!"

"Grandmamma indeed believes in this inheritance, but——"

"She thinks," interrupted the young man, zealously, "that before I join my regiment I should introduce myself to Aunt Stontheim."

"I have nothing against it, my child, and earnestly hope that grandmamma is not mistaken with regard to this matter of inheritance; I——" she sighed, and was silent, but on her face was an expression as if she would say, "I hope nothing more."

"Grandmamma said she was a peculiar woman, Aunt Stontheim—full of prejudices and whims," continued Army, questioningly.

"Certainly; and besides that, Army, I do not understand how grandmamma can so fully believe that aunt will make you her heirs, for the Derenbergs in Königsberg are just as likely to be heirs as we. You know, Army, Colonel von Derenberg, of the sixteenth regiment —his daughter has the same right as you and Nelly.'

Digitized by Google

At this moment Sanna opened the lofty folding-doors, and the old Baroness Derenberg entered the room, a still stately, imperious apparition; she held herself irreproachably erect in spite of her sixty years; she wore her simple, gray woolen robe with the same dignity and charm with which she had once crossed the room in heaviest trailing silk. Her heavy, still dark hair, loosely drawn back from the temples, was covered by a little cap, under whose yellow old lace border flamed the large black eyes which upstairs, in the ancestral hall, looked out so seductively from the youthful, proud face of the beautiful mistress of the castle. A truly aristocratic air pervaded her whole appearance, and the delicate features wore an expression of not to be humbled pride. How old the careworn, sickly daughter-in-law looked beside this imposing woman!

The young officer hurried to meet her; he took a large book in clumsy binding, which she held in her hands, from her, and then led her to the fire, where Sanna had already arranged several chairs. The granddaughter likewise had quickly sprung up, and the pale woman secretly dried the last tears from her eyes, and tried to charm a pleasant smile to her face.

"What were you talking of here?" asked the old baroness, while she took a seat by the fire and dismissed the servant with a gesture. "I heard something of 'the same rights as Army and Nelly.'"

"We spoke of Aunt Stontheim and the matter of inheritance," replied her daughter-in-law, also seating herself by the fire, so that her back was toward the light; "and then I thought of the Königsberg Derenbergs, and said that Blanche von Derenberg had as much right to the inheritance as our children."

Digitized by Google

"Blanche! What an idea!" cried the old lady, shrugging her shoulders; "that red-haired, scrofulous creature! The Stontheim—thank God—has too good taste to make such a mistake; besides, as I remember, she has a very justified dislike for this philanthropic sir colonel, and an equal one for his extremely blonde lady wife, whom he picked up in Heaven knows what corner of England or Scotland—she is a Miss Smith or

Newman, is she not? Well, it was some such obscure person, and even for this reason the Stontheim would hold back. Now that is again a quite unreasonable story, hunted up to worry yourself with, Cornelia; for which you certainly have a great talent, Cornelia."

There was something of irony in her speech, as always, when the proud woman addressed her daughter-in-law.

"I only meant," replied she gently, "that we cer-

Digitized by Google

tainly could not reckon with surety upon this inheritance, as you do, mamma; and I should like to make this clear to Army, for nothing is so sad as shattered hopes; life brings so many disappointments with it."

"You really make me nervous, Cornelia," said the old lady, irritably. "I nevertheless assert that it will be true that the inheritance comes to the children, if these know how to behave, and Army is a sensible, clever fellow; he will know how to turn this dreadful old aunt's heart to him, so that the really princely property falls to him."

"How do you mean, grandmamma?" suddenly said the clear voice of the young man, and his dark eyes looked questioningly at her. "I hope you do not desire that I should go on a legacy hunt, as they call it? I will meet her politely, as is proper for a gentleman with a lady, but that is all. I cannot fawn upon her. What she will not give me of her own free will she may keep!"

The grandmother drew herself up in astonishment from her indolent position in the arm-chair, and her eyes sparkled with rage at this unexpected declaration of her grandson. "Would one consider that possible from such a young greenhorn?" she asked, in a tone which she tried to make sound jesting, but her voice trembled with anger. "Hey, Army! Have you, then, with your cadet coat, taken off respect, and do you think because you have worn epaulettes for a week that you can instruct your grandmother and despise her good counsel? You are still too young to be able to rightly judge the circumstances in which you will now enter. Dear me! is it legacy hunting when one seeks to win the heart of a lonely old relative?"

Digitized by Google

"Yes, grandmamma," said Army firmly, and not a muscle changed in his handsome face. "Yes, it is legacy hunting as soon as one seeks to win with the heart of a person her money also——"

"Which one has extreme need of, if one does not wish to starve all one's life, and suffer want in a castle without resource or domains," interrupted the old baroness angrily, and pushed her chair back.

"That I admit, grandmamma," continued Army. "I would never have used the expression if there had not been an heiress already; but because Blanche——"

"Blanche again! Do you, perchance, know her? Do you know whether she still lives, the sickly creature? It is horrible to hear this childish wisdom, which tastes of the confirmation hours, exposed! But you, Cornelia, have conjured up this nonsense, and naturally, in your moral zeal, did not think how much could be lost by such narrow-minded views. I urgently desire, Army, that you travel to Stontheim; I will bear no opposition; to-day goes the letter which announces you."

"Certainly, grandmamma, I will go," said Army, with cold politeness; "as soon as you wish."

She rose; her proud face was flushed a dark red, and around her mouth lay a peculiarly obstinate expression; never had the similarity between grandmother and grandson been more striking. With sparkling eyes and lips tightly pressed together, with stiff bearing, they stood opposite each other, neither giving way to the other.

"You will leave to-morrow afternoon with the five o'clock post," said she, coldly and decidedly, and, without awaiting the assenting bow of the young man,

Digitized by Google

she greeted her astounded daughter-in-law with a slight inclination of the head, and left the room.

A painful silence prevailed when the folding-doors had closed behind the tall figure. The younger baroness was frightened; she did not understand how any one could contradict the feared mother-in-law, and he who had ventured to do so stood there by the fireplace so quietly, and looked in the flames as if the proud grandmother, whose word was law for every one in the house, had not just left the room in evident rage at his opposition. Nelly looked at her brother with astonished eyes,—he was so different; and secretly she acknowledged that Lieschen was right when she said he at times strikingly resembled his grandmother.

Now in the corridor the bell which called Sanna to her mistress rang violently and shrilly. After a while the servant came breathlessly into the room, holding a letter in her hand, and asked:

"Does the baroness wish anything from the village? Henry must go to the post-office; it snows very hard now, and perhaps it could all be done at once."

The baroness answered in the negative, and the old woman quickly disappeared. Amry meanwhile had seated himself at the table, and turned over the leaves of the book which he had before taken from his grandmother's hands.

"You were too abrupt, Amry," now began his mother. "Grandmamma has placed all her hopes on this inheritance, and you speak of legacy hunting. The expression is somewhat too strong. Shall you go to-morrow?" she asked.

"Yes, mamma; I must really, or else I will have no time to suitably insinuate myself into Aunt Stontheim's

Digitized by Google

good graces, and thereby win grandmamma's pardon. But I tell you this, mamma; I will do nothing, absolutely nothing which could have even the remotest appearance that I counted on her money." He bent his head on the book again.

"That you indeed should not, Army," confirmed the pale woman, anxiously, "I beg of you! You have this evening just the obstinate expression upon your face with which grandmamma defends her views. What will come of it if two such hard stones come together!"

But the young man did not answer. He looked at the book with an anxious expression of the deepest interest, and a slight blush rose to his face.

"Here I find something about our beautiful Agnes Mechthilde upstairs in the ancestral hall," said he joyfully. "Come here, little sister. This is interesting. Only listen!"

Digitized by Google

The young girl stepped up to him, bent over the arm of his chair, and looked curiously at the yellow paper covered with writing difficult to decipher. He read, spelling it out with difficulty:

"'On the 30th of November, in the year 1694, here at Castle Derenberg, the corpse of the high-born lady, Agnes Mechthilde, Baroness of Derenberg, Schültenfelde and Braunsbach, a born Freün Krobitz of the Trauen house, was solemnly buried in the vault of this place, and according to the arrangements made with her own hands during her lifetime. And the noble corpse stood in the hall near the chapel, and first a large white, and over this a black, velvet pall with crosses of silver cloth sewed upon it, covered the coffin; above lay a silver crucifix, and on each side were eight small, but at the head and foot larger, coats of arms, richly embroidered in orange-colored silk—that of the Derenbergs as well as that of the Trauens. The coffin was carried into the chapel by those of the nobility who were settled in the neighborhood, and who had often banqueted here. Next behind walked the six sons of the deceased, and then the widower, who was very sorrowful.'

"That is tiresome," the young officer interrupted himself; "but hear—listen further."

"'And the Lady Agnes Mechthilde, Baroness of Derenberg, was a very proud and clever lady, who bravely upheld her husband in all his doings. She had a long, delicate figure, and red hair, which really was no good sign, for an old proverb says:

"Women and horses, they say,
Are they beautiful, keep away.
Are they without maliciousness,

Digitized by Google

Truly 'tis a happiness.
But beware what colored hair,
If 'tis red there's danger there."

"'Still she had no more malice than other women, and was a fine, beautiful woman, and had a gentleman so in love with her, and she could not bear him, that in despair he took his own life—which may God pardon him!—and she found him swimming in his blood before the door of her room, which so frightened her that in that very hour she fell into a hot fever, so that they thought she would unhappily give up her life. The all-merciful God gave her a happy convalescence; still she never laughed again after this, and the cavalier, a Baron von Strütvitz, is buried here in the castle garden.'"

"What do you say to that, little mother?" cried Army, quite excited. "I believe that one could take his life for her sake. It is a wonderful face. I wish I might take the picture with me and hang it in my lieutenant room; she must have been a charming creature, this Agnes Mechthilde."

"Oh, Army!" smiled the baroness. "I did not know that your first love would be your ancestress. Well, at least it is not dangerous. What do you think, Nelly?"

Nelly did not answer. The gay mood would not return to the little circle; the young girl sat silently bent over her work, and thought of what she could tell Lieschen for an excuse. Army sunk himself in the reading of the old book again, and the slight smile had disappeared from the lips of the baroness. Occasionally she passed her hand over her eyes and sighed deeply, and each time that such a timid sigh came to her children's ears they turned their heads at the same time, and their

Digitized by Google

sad gaze rested for a moment questioningly upon the troubled face of their mother; then they resumed their occupation again.

"Her gracious ladyship, the baroness, wishes to drink tea in her room," said old Sanna, coming in. "She begs you to excuse her from dining with you this evening; the baroness has a headache."

The old woman carried a salver with an antique little teapot, and a cup of rococo ornamentation. She was evidently about to take her mistress the tea, and now stood at the door awaiting an answer; she looked closely at the three figures as if she wished to ascertain what impression this news made upon them. The old woman knew too well that a scene between mother-in-law and daughter had again occurred, but this time something especial must be at stake, for she had seldom seen her mistress so excited. She could meanwhile calmly make her observations for a time, for the dreamy woman beside the fire seemed not to have heard her words, and only started up when her daughter said. pleasantly:

"We are certainly very sorry, dear Sanna; and heartily wish grandmamma a speedy recovery."

"Is your mistress ill, Sanna?" asked the baroness.

"Yes, indeed," replied Sanna, and her large, bony frame drew itself up to its full height, while the gray eyes under the gloomy brows looked fixedly at the startled face of her interrogator. "The baroness must have gone away from here ill, for she came into her room with a violent palpitation of the heart. I have had to mix her three powders. If only nothing worse comes of it!"

Something reproachful, impertinent, was in this

Digitized by Google

answer, less in the words than in the voice and the expression of the face, so that the blood rushed to the cheeks of the pale woman, from her annoyance.

"I am very sorry," said she, with raised voice, while

she made a gesture of dismissal; "and I hope that the baroness will feel better to-morrow."

"Very well," replied the old woman, and left the room, but her bearing, and the expression on her face below the folded cap, had become almost hostile.

Army had sprung up, and with dark, red face looked after the disappearing servant; then he hastily went to the door.

"Army, I beg you," said the baroness, "let her alone! You will not make it better if you make her speak. She has always been so; like her mistress, she cannot

Digitized by Google

disown her hot southern blood, and then, she loves grandmamma idolatrously, and is angry with every one whom she considers the cause of a vexation to her. Stay, Army, let us not wholly embitter our last evening; who knows when we will see each other again? Consider that Sanna came here with your grandmother from Venice; that she has lived with her in the time of splendor, and now faithfully shares her cares and deprivations with her. Sanna has many good sides; fidelity like hers is unusual, and you children—especially you, Army—she loves beyond everything; besides, she is so old that we must not be vexed with her for many things."

The young man did not answer; he took his cap. "I must go out in the open air for a few moments, or else I shall sleep badly," added he in excuse, kissed his mother's hand and left the room.

He stood in the lofty, cold corridor and asked himself where he really wished to go. "First I must get my overcoat," thought he, and went down the long hall to his room. He felt so strangely to-day; for the first time his young mind had felt the reality of life. To be sure, he knew that his family were in needy circumstances, but, in true boyish fashion, he had not thought much about it. Now his grandmother had spoken to him concerning this, and at the same time had held out to him the hopes of a rich inheritance; but there was an heiress there—a little red-haired creature, his grandmamma had called her.

The beautiful Agnes Mechthilde occurred to him; how did the verse run: "But beware what colored hair. If 'tis red, great danger's there." The red hair was not to bring him danger also? But no—he had no tendency to fatalism.

Digitized by Google

Grandmother had said: "On you, Army, and upon the Stontheim inheritance I build all my hopes"; and now he had met her with something about "legacy hunting." But really, Blanche — little, red-haired Blanche — there she was again. Meanwhile Aunt Stontheim could divide between Blanche, Nelly, and him—yes, that was a way out of it. Might not all yet be well?

He shivered; he stepped up to the fireplace and threw a handful of brushwood into the glowing fire; the flames seized upon the dry wood with a crackle, and flickeringly and unsteadily lit up the inlaid floor. Its reddish light made the gilded carving on the old mantelpiece shine brightly, and the eyes of the young man dreamily followed the windings of the oak-leaf garlands under the edge of the mantel; in the middle they surrounded like a wreath a shield; a proverb stood upon it, "Trust God for aye; luck comes each day," a saying of an old, long-past time. "Luck comes each day," repeated he softly again. Had he, then, never read those words before? They had a great effect upon him at this hour; could not, then, happiness come to him again?

He looked up at the splendid deer antlers; they had all been won by the Derenbergs, as the tablets with name and date showed, all in the woods which had been partly sold, partly mortgaged. But it might be possible—why not, then?—that he would hunt there again, where his forefathers had held so many merry deer hunts. No; away with anxiety! Life lay before him, so full of hopes, so alluring, and "Luck comes each day." That was the right proverb.

Sunshine came again to his young face; his heart

Digitized by Google

beat hotly in his breast, and he felt the courage to defy even storms. "Only forward, further into the waves of life! The heavier the breakers, the better! Pleasure or pain, I take it as it comes. A life without conflict—that is no life. I will beg grandmamma's pardon for the legacy hunting," he continued. "Mamma also shall not be so sad any longer—why see everything so gloomy? Even the child hung her head. Yes, indeed; that was on account of Liese, little rag. Liese, pah! that is not worth talking about, and she will see later that——"

He whistled a song to himself, as he strode along the corridor to return to his mother.

Digitized by Google

III.

On the following morning Army stood before his gra..dmother with a sunny face; he had obtained her forgiveness. To be sure, she smilingly shrugged her shoulders when he told her his plan that the still unknown Blanche could inherit with them. "You are a visionary, Army," said she jestingly, but did not contradict him, but pointed with a slender hand to a stool at her feet. "Sit down. I have several things to tell you before we part."

The old lady's room had kept its luxurious furnishings; and at first sight almost made an impression of splendor. Whoever looked more closely saw indeed that the colors of the heavy crimson material were faded, and the silk was torn here and there; but in spite of this, the heavy folds of the curtains at doors and windows, the delicate ebony furniture, the large Smyrna rug, gave the room an almost luxuriantly elegant character. From the walls gay landscapes of sunny Italy looked down from golden frames; these pictures were souvenirs of happy days which the baroness, as the young, admired Countess Luja, had passed in Venice and Naples; and in these recollections she forgot the inconsolable present.

"I do not need to give you a hint as to your behavior to Aunt Stontheim, Army," began she, cleverly avoiding yesterday's breach. "You will know how to be-

Digitized by Google

have. Give her my most cordial greeting, and tell her I have become a weary old woman."

"I must refuse this commission, grandmamma," replied Army gallantly; "it is impossible for me to burden my conscience with a lie."

The old lady laughed, flattered, and giving him a slight tap on the cheeks, she remarked: "Do not be sarcastic to your old grandmother."

Army kissed her hand. "And what else has grandmamma to tell me?"

"Yes, really, I must warn you of something. You are entering life very young, and have inherited the

passionate blood of my ancestors. Enjoy your youth to your heart's delight, but guard yourself from a serious liking. Much must be united in the one whom you bring home; old family and wealth, Army, much wealth.

Digitized by Google

It is one of the few ways which stand open to you to restore the lost brilliancy of your house. So, and that was all," concluded she; "and if you promise to write to me occasionally, we have nothing further to say to each other."

The young officer smiled.

"Certainly, grandmamma, I will write soon, for I will have much time; and do not worry yourself! I cannot possibly think of marrying now; I am only nineteen." He laughed aloud; there was no trace of yesterday's shadow upon his face. "May I now bid you good-bye, grandmamma?" he asked; "I should like to once more go up into the ancestral hall, to pay a farewell visit to the beautiful Agnes Mechthilde. See, grandmamma, I can at once calm you," he added; "if I do not find a girl who looks like her, then I will certainly never marry, for she is my ideal of a wife."

"You mean the Mechthilde with the red hair?" asked the old lady, quite astonished.

"Yes," nodded the grandson. "I have a weakness for red hair. *Apropos*, grandmamma, may I keep the old book which you brought downstairs with you yesterday evening?"

"Certainly. It is a family chronicle, and I meant it for you."

"Thank you a thousand times, dear grandmamma. *Au revoir* until noon!" He kissed her delicate hand, and immediately after the red folds of the portière fell behind him.

Whistling a tune, he strode along the corridor, and soon stood in the ancestral hall before the picture of the beautiful Agnes Mechthilde. A dim half-light prevailed in the large room; Army drew back the cur-

Digitized by Google

tain of the nearest window, and soon the beams of the cold, clear winter sun fell upon the red hair of the beautiful woman; golden sparks seemed to shoot from it, and again the eyes exercised the old charm upon him—those dreamy, unfathomably melancholy eyes.

Then he heard a light step, and the little rosy hand of his sister was laid on his shoulder.

"Here you are hiding, Army! We are going to dinner. Come down, Army. You must leave soon after, and I have not seen you the whole morning."

He drew the young girl to him. "Look at me, Nelly," he begged, and with his hand raised her head a little. "Are you happy, or are you angry with me?"

Her eyes grew moist as she looked in her brother's face, but she smilingly shook her head.

"Angry? Oh, no! But please come, it is so cold here."

He took her hand, and they went towards the door; before he closed it he turned once more to the picture.

"But beware what colored hair! If 'tis red, great danger's there," he whispered to himself.

"Good-bye, my dear, dear Army!" said the baroness, when, later, her son stood before her ready for the journey. "God keep you; and, Army," whispered she, and her pale face was raised supplicatingly to him, "is it not true, you will not gamble, or be dissipated? No; promise nothing. I know you will not; you will think of your sick mother; and now, for the last time, farewell, and write soon, very soon." She kissed him once more on the forehead, and then, sobbing, turned back into the room. He was still so young, so young! May God protect him out there in the great world; the mother heart could do nothing further than to pray for him.

Digitized by Google

His sister, in cloak and hat, soon joined him. "I will accompany you to the village, Army," begged she. "Yes?"

Up in one of the window niches of the corridor stood old Sanna, and looked after the departing one. "His grandmother all over again," murmured she to herself; "it does one's heart good only to look at him." She held her hand over her eyes to see him better. "He will not fail," thought she; "he can knock when he will; it will be the wealthiest and the most beautiful one, and such misfortune as his father had will certainly not follow him. Oh, if my baroness could only live to see once more a happy, gay life flourishing here in the castle! She would once more be young and beautiful. O my Lord, how I would thank you on my knees for it!"

Meanwhile the brother and sister walked along down the old linden alley; it was a wonderfully beautiful winter scene which lay before them. Below, where the alley ended, shone the white, snow-covered mountains, framed by the trees; to one side were seen the houses of the village, with their snowy roofs; from every chimney a column of smoke rose straight up in the cold winter air; and at the other side stretched out the forest, in the splendor of its icy load; over paths and roads lay a dazzlingly white covering; all nature was still as death; only a flock of crows, with hoarse "caw! caw!" flew up from the trees, and shook from the branches the white ornament which now slowly sank to earth in a glittering shower. And over the whole lay the rosy glow of the setting sun, which faded in the distance to the most wonderful violet tinge.

The young man's gaze wandered over the charming landscape.

Digitized by Google

"See, Nelly," said he; "all this, as far as your eye reaches, was once ours."

"The paper mill also?" asked the little one, and pointed to the slate-covered roof of the same.

"Not the mill itself, but a large part of the land. Grandfather sold it to the miller's father, once when he was in difficulties—so grandmamma told me. The man now proudly goes hunting, while we——" he passed his hand over his eyes; then he laughed and began to whistle; he would not grumble now.

At the grated gate of the park he turned once more and looked back through the long alley. There was the massive portal; the steps of the broad flight were covered with snow, and the snow was piled up against the massive double doors. The castle stood out as beautiful as a fairy tale, irradiated by the now intensely red glow of the setting sun; the windows shone like molten gold down at the young man, just as golden and rosy as the dreams of the future which had unfolded in his heart.

"It must be different here," said he; "it must! I will it." He turned and followed his sister.

Silently they walked along side by side; at length the young officer stopped and looked at his watch.

"Do you know, little sister," said he, "I must walk quickly? I do not wish to miss the post; you go back. You will only get cold feet from the deep snow; farewell, little one, and greet them all warmly for me again!" He bent down and kissed her fresh mouth. "Do not let time be too long for you in the old, lonely castle," he added, and looked at her compassionately.

She shook her head. "Oh, I have Lieschen."

They stood just where the road by which they had

Digitized by Google

come turned into the village street. Yonder, between fir trees, a road led to the paper mill, and likewise led to this spot; the street came down quite steeply to the village, and a linden stretched its branches over a snow-covered stone bench. From the village plainly sounded a post-horn.

"As from thee I must part, one farewell kiss, my heart," sang a dear, childish voice, imitating the melody, sung joyously and teasingly, and immediately thereupon a young girl stepped out from behind the firs.

She started as she saw the two figures there; over her childish face for a moment flew a deep blush, and a pair of dark-blue eyes were lowered, as if frightened, to the ground; but then she at once came nearer, and her lovely red mouth smiled, so that two charming little dimples were formed in her cheeks.

"Ah, Nelly," cried she, "how lovely that I meet you! and you, Army?" she asked childishly and without a trace of shyness. "Are you going away again already, and have not once come to the mill to see us?"

The young officer had flushed deeply when he saw the blue eyes fixed upon him, and took the hand which she held out to him, child fashion. He was not yet worldly wise enough to find an excuse, and so she stood before him. The smile disappeared from her lovely rosy face, and she looked up at him questioningly and reproachfully.

"Army has to leave very suddenly," said Nelly, "or else——" she hesitated; it was impossible for her to lie to the unsuspecting child; she could have wept from shame, and looked up at her brother as if seeking help. But the few words had satisfied the young girl. "Good Army," said she, quite relieved; "I already suspected

Digitized by Google

you would no longer come to the mill. I was just going to Nelly "—she laughed so that the dimples again appeared in her cheeks—"so as to see if it is true that auntie says, namely, that you have grown proud. But now I can laugh at her, can I not? You would have surely come to-day or to-morrow," said she, happily.

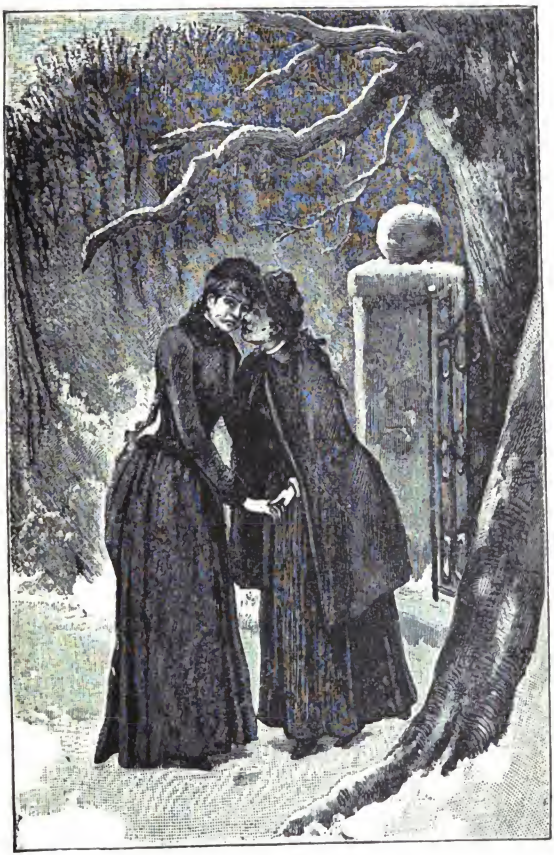
He looked down at her as if lost in thought. "How you have grown!" said he then, and his eyes wandered over the slender form. Lieschen had really grown to be almost as tall as himself; she looked so charming in the little blue velvet jacket, trimmed with fur; and suddenly she blushed deeply under his gaze, and said quickly:

"Are you going with the four o'clock post? Then you must hurry, Army. I am glad that I have seen you once as officer." She held out her hand to him again, and again he laid his in hers; he laughed now also; something like a recollection of his childhood came over him.

"The last, Army," cried she, then struck him gently on the shoulder and ran quickly away. For a moment the young man stood there as if he would, as formerly, hurry after her to give her back again her "last," as they had done every time when they had gone from the castle or the mill; they so loved to tease each other thus. But then he hastily drew his overcoat over his arm, nodded once more, and went. He did not again look around at the two young figures there, who looked after him, arm in arm; he must indeed hurry.

And up there under the old, snow-laden linden a pair of sweet blue eyes grew moist, and a voice from which the gayety had suddenly so wholly vanished whispered a soft "Farewell!"

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Nelly also wept, and as his form disappeared behind the houses of the village, she asked, anxiously: "You are not angry with Army, are you, Lieschen?"

But Lieschen did not answer; she only shook her head, and walked along quite silently beside her friend. The rosy glow had faded from the sky, and only a pale yellow still tinged the horizon; the windows of the old castle looked down as sadly as ever into the eternal monotony, and in both young hearts was the sadness of parting; the kiss which they exchanged for good-night at the grated gate of the park was tenderer, much tenderer than usual, and it seemed to Lieschen as if she could not let go of her little friend's hand to-day. And now, once more: "Good night!"

Digitized by Google

IV.

THE rag mill, as the paper factory had always been called in the whole region, lay charmingly situated between high old trees, on the rushing little river. The stately dwelling-house, with the gilded weather-vane on the pointed slate roof, dated from the first half of the former century, and had preserved the characteristics of the former time. The heavy oak door, with the polished brass knocker, was still the same; the many little panes of the windows had been replaced by no modern plate glass, and the carved inscription on the projecting gray old beams announced that this house was built, "To the honor of God, in the year 1741, by Johann Friedrich Ewing, and his wife, Ernestine, born Eisenhardtin." The old dragon-heads at the four corners of the roof were still ready to spit out the rain-water, and the gray sandstone bench near the house door, under the two large lindens, was still to-day considered the favorite place of the family on beautiful summer evenings. A large fruit garden surrounded the house on three sides, in accurately straight rows; a shady jasmine arbor, and many currant and gooseberry bushes; and this garden was under the especial rule of Auntie. In the whole region there were no such excellent apples and pears as at the rag mill, and the asparagus in Auntie's carefully

Digitized by Google

tended beds was fairly famous for its delicacy and unusual size.

Who could have thought of the rag mill without Auntie? How cheerful it looked when one crossed the

mill bridge which lay opposite the dwelling-house! The old woman's head then leaned out from behind the snow-white curtains to bid the guest welcome, with bright, pleasant eyes; she pushed the spinning-wheel

Digitized by Google

aside, and was so quick that she usually met the visitor in the always-open house door, with a pleasant "God greet you! How Minna"—she was the mistress of the house—or "How Frederick"—he was the master—"will be pleased!" and then she tripped on ahead, and opened the door to let the guest enter the comfortable sitting-room, and while she took the heavy bunch of keys from her side, then she hurriedly disappeared into the kitchen or dining-room.

The old woman had lived in the paper-mill house from her tenth year; she was an orphan, and the grandfather of the present owner had brought up the nice little girl; so she had been the playmate of both his children. She had rewarded this benevolence by fidelity and steady attachment, had shared good and bad times with the family, and had now been for a long time a member of the household, and fairly indispensible. The Ervings had always been noted for their kindness and benevolence to the poor; they had never let the right hand know what the left did, and the Lord had blessed them, as Auntie so often said; they were the wealthiest people far and near.

The men of the mill had always been of true German bone and sinew, whose hand-shake was worth more than ten oaths, and who united a firm will with ability and unwearied activity. "Pray and work" had been from early times the family motto, which was impressed upon the children by the parents. But the mill possessed other fame, which had become almost proverbial, and that was the beauty of the wives and daughters. "As pretty as if she came from the mill" was current in the village, if one wished to pay a pretty girl a compliment, and the blue eyes of the beautiful miller's

Digitized by Google

children had for long years caused much grief and heartache. The old mill had seen much happy life.

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" had also been a proverb which was respected, and the youthful pleasures could flourish there undisturbed. Was it in winter at sleighing parties, and afterwards by the warm stove, while punch and baked apples were not lacking; or on summer days, in the cool woods, on warm, fragrant evenings under the lindens, where the young people sang by moonlight or played forfeits, and the old people talked of happy past days, there was always honest, true, golden happiness. And then the daughters left the house to follow their husbands to their assured home, and the sons founded homes; but the eldest always brought a lovely wife home to the old mill, and the parents blessed the grandchild before they died in peace.

They had always had pleasant, neighborly relations with the Derenbergs; there were natures on both sides which must highly respect each other; and when the baron rode along the mill stream and saw the miller sitting under the linden with his wife, there always ensued a pleasant conversation. Also in time of need they offered each other the hand, and in the wars which occurred in the years 1807 to 1813 blood relations could not have clung more faithfully together than the proud Derenbergs and the Ervings of the paper mill.

When Auntie came to the house two happy children bloomed for the owner. The girl was her own age, the boy about four years older. She grew up with them; to be sure, the miller's wife, a woman who was as good a housekeeper as she was pious, strictly insisted that the little orphan girl from the poor day laborer's house

Digitized by Google

should keep her own rank; she should later serve as maid in the house, but Mrs. Erving could not and would not prevent the three children from playing together, and that a tender friendship developed between the two girls, which became ever firmer with years. The boy, on his side, was a good comrade of the two sons who grew up in the castle, and the Baroness Derenberg loved the blonde, curly-haired lad so much that she persuaded the parents to let him share the instruction of her sons. So little Frederick came from the village school to the school-room of the baronial castle, and there has hardly ever been a more thankful scholar.

The two young Derenbergs came quite often with their tutor to the mill, and, as wild boys, liked to play with Lisette and little Marie—that was Auntie's name—hide and seek, and blindman's buff. Later also, when they were grown, and had long ago made the grand tour of foreign countries, the eldest already entered upon the estate which his father had left behind him, and the younger become a gay cavalry officer, they still liked to come to the old house again to visit the friends. Little Lisette had meanwhile grown to a stately maiden; she possessed the proverbial beauty of the miller's daughters in abundant measure, and could look at one so winningly with her great eyes, which were as deep and blue as the lake in the Derenberg forests.

Marie had also grown up a fine girl, as the mistress of the house said: she sprang and sang round the kitchen and cellar, and had such a roguish, pleasant way that one must like the good creature, with her red cheeks. She must now indeed address her playmate only as "Mam'sell," and "you," but at times the con-

Digitized by Google

fidential Lisette and thou again came to her lips, and many summer evenings they sat tightly clasped to each other in the jasmine arbor, there by the water, as they had done when children.

And it was at this time that a sad story occurred to the family, so sad that the bowed parents thought they could scarcely bear it, and the gay Marie became a serious, quiet girl; it concerned the treasure of the house, the beautiful Lisette.

The charming child had truly often enough heard the rhyme from her mother, who knew so many proverbs:

> "Land and rank in equal share,
> Equal years, make the happiest pair."

but how could she think of it when love really entered her young heart, which would hear nothing of rank and condition. And she loved for the first time, with her pure, confiding child-heart, and the love which was cherished for her in return was no less true and pure than hers. Then a hand roughly and wickedly interfered with the just-blossomed happiness; it was a delicate, beautiful woman's hand, but it tore the two hearts so roughly asunder that one died from the wound—the beautiful Lisette closed her wonderful blue eyes, after a short, heavy illness, for ever.

That had been a hard blow for the inhabitants of the mill. The father, soon after his darling, worried himself into his grave, and the mother humbly bowed her head to the will of the Almighty, with sorrowful face, conducting the housekeeping for her son. The relations with the castle were abruptly broken off, and when the young baron rode by on the forest road at the side of his beautiful wife, then the bowed mother rose

Digitized by Google

and went into the house, and her son looked silently down at the ground, and did not return his friend's greeting; but Marie set down the bucket with which she was to fetch water, on the ground, and her hands clenched themselves under her apron as she looked after them, and saw the white plume wave on the hat of the proud young mistress of the castle, and her fresh lips murmured something of vengeance and God's justice, while her eyes sparkled with tears. "She is from that frivolous Italy," she then whispered; "what can she know of how a German heart feels when it loves any one so truly and tenderly?"

Yes, Marie really knew how it is when one loves with all one's heart, for she already had a lover, and in the evening, when she went to her room, and her Christian's last kiss yet burned on her red mouth, she knelt down before her simple bed and sent up a warm prayer of thanks to God that she was a poor girl and he only a poor boy, about whom no one troubled if they loved each other, or had any objection to their marrying.

"I will not be courted from the castle, Christian," she had said at that time, and as just then a good place was free at the mill, he left the baronial service and came to the old mill. Soon after he married his pleasant, pretty, always industrious little bride, and if grief for Lisette had not still always lurked in the heart of the young wife, she would have been perfectly happy. But, in truth, happiness has wings, and suffering stands watch over so many children of men. Scarcely a half year after there was another green mound under the old lindens in the village churchyard, over which she could weep; her Christian had been taken from her very sud-

Digitized by Google

denly. It was long before she rallied again from this pain, before she was able again to think and work; but then it was necessary to rouse herself. The old mistress, weary of life, stretched herself on a sick-bed, and gave over to the young widow the care for the large house, to which she devoted herself with all her strength.

That was now long, long ago, and the people who had lived in the mill at that time had long been dead. Marie had grown old, and remained with the Ervings, honored and loved as if she belonged to the family. Frederick Erving, the present owner of the mill, the nephew of the beautiful Lisette, had found in her a second mother; for, when his parents died early, she took him to her loving heart, and brought him up. He had grown up well under her protection; and when, one day, he brought home a lovely wife, she met the young couple pleasantly on the sill of the paternal residence, and the young husband laid his new treasure lovingly in her arms. "There, Auntie," for so he always called her, "now love her a little, too, and be a mother to us both!"

So thus it had been. And then when Auntie stood at the font in the old village church, and held a little daughter of the young couple, and a pair of large blue child eyes looked up at her, tears of joy fell on the child's cradle, and a warm prayer of thankfulness for all the happiness which came to her share rose to heaven. The child received the name of Lieschen.

About this time the catastrophe broke over the heads of the residents of the castle, and shocked the hearts in the quiet mill—the sudden death of Baron Derenberg. Auntie sat silent before her spinning-wheel, and thought how justly God's mills grind. And when, one

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY
Digitized by Google

day, her darling, the little four-year-old Lieschen, and another just such little blonde curly head, came tripping hand in hand over the mill bridge, followed by a boy, handsome as a picture, with black hair and defiant eyes, who embarrassedly played with his whip, she went to meet them, took the sweet little curly head in her arms, and when the child had nodded to the question whether she lived in the castle, she carried her into the sitting-room to the young wife, and then took the boy by one hand and Lieschen by the other, and led them in; and both women, the old one and the young, caressed the little fatherless children, until at length the little blonde girl threw her little arms round the old woman's neck, and the boy took, with sparkling eyes, the apple which she held out to him. And then when they went home again over the mill bridge, the brother carefully leading his little sister, and both turned their heads again and again, and nodded back, the young wife pressed her little daughter to her heart, and, while great tears shone in her eyes, she said: "This evening we must thank the dear God that you still have a father, such a dear, good one; see the two children there; they have no longer a father, and they lack so much else, so much!" From that day dated the friendship between the miller's Lieschen and Nelly and Army.

At the mill, meanwhile, life had passed pleasantly. Business throve splendidly; the property increased from year to year, and the miller could certainly have enjoyed his life undisturbed, if his wife's health had not caused him more and more anxiety. She came from a family in which consumption seemed to be hereditary, and her mother had died of the insidious disease.

Digitized by Google

Meanwhile Lieschen blossomed out even more lovely, and that proverbial beauty which had once been the charm of the lovely Lisette developed in her. And when Auntie looked at her all the charm of recollection filled her old heart, and she never wearied of looking into the large eyes, which were as deep and blue as the lake up there in the forest. She trilled and sang the whole day, and joked with her father and Auntie; for the latter possessed a peculiar dry humor, and her speech, mixed with proverbs, was a source of the greatest delight to the young girl.

Her father wished to send her to boarding-school, but her mother and Auntie begged so pleadingly to let the child remain at home that he granted their request. And so the pastor taught her, her father's friend and her godfather, and his wife spoke French with her, and taught her to sing; and when she sang in her flexible, not strong alto voice the folk-songs of her home, then father and mother sat on the large sofa, and their hands clasped each other more tightly, and Auntie's eyes grew moist. "Just like Lisette," she said then, half aloud. "God guard our Lieschen!"

That Army, now he had become a fine officer, had not visited the mill again, scarcely surprised the old woman. "It is the grandmother's blood," said she; "how can he help it? It is well so," she added, with a glance at the young girl. But Lieschen would not believe that Army could have become proud—the same Army with whom, not such a long time ago, she had laughed so unrestrainedly. She must ask him herself. She set out for the castle, and she met the brother and sister at the great linden. Army was about to leave, but it had so easily been explained: he must go away

Digitized by Google

suddenly or else he would surely have come. When she then again stood in the warm room before the old

woman, who was busily spinning, she said: "See, Auntie; it is not at all true that Army is proud. He could not come because he had to go away very hurriedly—I knew it."

"So?" asked the old woman.

"Yes; you bad Auntie, you fairly frightened me, you——" pouted she.

"Ah, the egg is always wiser than the hen," replied she. "So Nelly told you he wished to come?"

"Yes; and Nelly does not tell lies."

"Nelly is a good child. I am always glad when she comes. She has the Derenberg face and heart—they

Digitized by Google

were brave people, the Derenbergs—until the——" she was silent.

'What do you mean, Auntie?"

"No, when the devil wishes to corrupt people he is as beautiful as an angel."

"What do you say?"

"I say nothing; that is only for me, but you can believe it, Liesel, what the pastor preached from the chancel on Sunday, 'Our God is a just God,' that is a true saying; and now do not look at me so surprisedly. Rather go to the second oven. There are some fine baked apples for you."

Digitized by Google

V.

Two years and several months have passed over the land. Now it was a May evening. Through the open window came a soft, delicate perfume into Auntie's little room. The wind blew the young leaves of the vine which framed the window, and the moon threw her white light on the clean boards, on the simple furniture of the homely room, and shone full upon the wrinkled face of the old woman, who, her industrious hands folded in her lap, sat by the window and looked out into the garden, in which the apple-trees and the elders now stood in full bloom. Auntie had her time of rest. No more lights in these long evenings, that was a good old custom in her house, and people like to rest at times, not only their hands, but their thoughts. These really did not rest at all; for they wandered far back in the past, in lovely, distant days, and that was a pleasure, a recreation, when, after the toil and heat of the day, twilight came. All was arranged and cared for in the house; the present wholly disappeared on this fragrant spring evening from the gaze of the old woman, and the time of her youth rose before her, fragrant and moonlit like the world without.

Auntie folded her hands and turned her head back in the room; her eyes rested on a little picture over the

Digitized by Google

bureau, which, in the bright moonlight, showed the silhouette of a man's head.

"Yes, yes, my Christian," she whispered softly, "we both loved each other very dearly; and although you were only with me for a short time, I have not forgotten you, and have been true to you to this day. To think that it must happen thus, it is so sad! Dear God in heaven, what can one not live through in this short period of time! Man scarcely has a few happy years, and then comes sorrow. Ah, we were a pair of happy girls, my Lisette and I, and just as we thought the world most beautiful, weeping began. Dear Heaven! my Lisette, and my good old Christian!" She nodded her head sadly, for before her eyes rose two green, turf-covered mounds over there in the shadow of the churchyard lindens.

Then a blooming elder twig flew through the window, and full in her lap. Teasing laughter rang out.

"Now wait. That is Liesel," said the Auntie, and a mischievous expression drove away the sad one; now she sat quite still and leaned back in her arm-chair. Presently a girl's head surmounted by dark braids appeared before the window and peeped in.

"Not there!" she said, vexedly; but then she cried out, startled, for the elder twig hit her face.

"Fie! How horrid, Auntie, to frighten me so!"

"Oh, what! Who was frightened first?" replied the old woman. "What, you imp, you are not going to act offended?"

The girl did not answer that, but asked: "Are father and mother back from the city yet?"

"Not yet; they will not be before eleven, child. Go to sleep quietly. I will stay awake."

Digitized by Google

"But what are you thinking of, Auntie?" cried the young girl, "on this wonderful evening? Come outdoors for a little while under the linden. Only smell the fragrance of the elder! You do not know how lovely it is in the garden."

"Ah, child, that is no longer for me. Old people can hardly be made young. It is damp outside, and—my stupid gout—but you stay out there and enjoy the beautiful evening!"

"Then, Auntie, I will come in to you. May I? I cannot be alone this evening, not for the world."

"Well, come, then, you foolish thing."

The head disappeared from the window, and soon after the room door opened, and the tall, slender, girlish figure in the light dress entered the room.

"Here I am, Auntie!" cried she gaily, and seated herself on a stool at the old woman's feet. The moonlight fell full on a small, oval face, and showed a pair of wonderful, deep blue eyes, which looked pleadingly up at the old woman.

"Auntie," said she softly, "tell me something this evening, please——"

"Ah! Shall I tell such a big girl fairy stories still?"

"Oh, certainly not! Something about you, about your youth, Auntie."

"About my youth? But what then?"

"Ah, Auntie," came back hesitatingly, "tell me how it was when you—when you saw your lover for the first time."

"Oh, you—curious thing! You are much too young to know all. Why should I tell you?"

"But I am seventeen, Auntie. Other girls have long been engaged at that age, and——"

Digitized by Google

"Oh, see that! You would like to have one, too—oh, oh, if I tell your mother that——"

"Only do it, Auntie," cried the young girl, laughing.

"Mother recently showed me, oh, so much linen, and said: 'That is all for your dowry, Liesel.'"

"Well, I must say! But what do you want to know?"

Digitized by Google

"You shall tell me how it was when you saw your dead husband for the first time."

The old woman was silent, and the young girl before her looked up at her expectantly, with great, moist eyes. It was so quiet around them, only the Black Forest clock in its gay painted case, near the stove, said its monotonous tick, tack, and from without sounded the rush of the water which fell over the dam in soft, perpetual melody.

"Three lilies, three lilies, they planted on my grave," sang a fresh girl's voice down in the garden.

Auntie raised her head. "That is Dora. Only hear how she can sing, and was scolded to-day. Yes, yes, love and song cannot be restrained. I knew that song when I was young," said Auntie, and nodded. "I also sat down there in the jasmine arbor with Lisette, and sang to my heart's content, and she could too, so very beautifully—but you wished to know," she interrupted herself quickly, "where I saw him for the first time. Well, then, on just such a summer evening as this; it was somewhat later in the year, in July perhaps. I walked along the path which leads by the park and sang; I do not know exactly what it was: 'He's with the emperor, he's with the emperor; a soldier's he, a soldier's he!' Then from the shadow of the linden alley a man stepped out and asked, 'Well, my girl, must it be just a soldier?' and because I was so frightened I did not answer, and walked on quickly. But he followed me, and politely begged my pardon; and then when I looked at him more closely I saw such a dear, good face, with a pair of honest, faithful eyes, that I was not frightened at all any more. Then we walked slowly along together, and he told me that he was

Digitized by Google

hostler at the castle to the young baroness, who now is the grandmother of Nelly and Army, who at that time had just come there, and that he had often looked at me when he rode by the mill, for you know I served here with your blessed great-grandmother. And I told him of myself, too; how I had no father and mother, and then we shook hands at the mill bridge, and he said, 'Good night, Marie!' and then we said nothing else, but stood silently near each other for quite a long while, and at last I tore my hand away and ran away over the bridge as fast as I could."

"How did you feel then, Auntie?"

"Yes, that I do not know exactly now, Liesel," said the old woman. "I only know that it was lovely, ah, too lovely! that it seemed to me as if the moon had never shone down so golden upon the old mill, and as if the heavens had never been so high. I could not sleep the whole night, and still was not at all tired the next day; and the words, 'Good night, Marie,' always rang in my ears. Your blessed great-grandmother had much to scold me for, the next day, but I scarcely heard her; and Lisette and I always smiled at each other secretly, for at that time she, too, was so happy with all her heart. Ah, yes; love is something wonderful."

The old woman looked down at the young girl, whose eyes glistened with tears. "But tell me, Liesel, what is the matter with you?"

"Ah, nothing at all, Auntie," replied she. "Do you know, I will go out in front of the door for a little. Father and mother must come soon. Good night, Auntie!"

"Good night, Liesel. God keep you! But listen, child, if to-morrow morning you cut asparagus again

Digitized by Google

do not leave half standing, as you did to-day, or else, in future, I must look after it myself, however hard it is for me. Good night!"

And now the old woman was alone in her little room again. She closed the window, and, shaking her head, walked to the bureau. She looked at her Christian's picture; the moonbeams had gone further, she could no longer plainly distinguish the little picture, but she knew exactly how it looked.

"Yes, so it was," whispered she, "out there by the mill bridge it began. Love has a good memory. I recall it this evening just as well as if we had stood there yesterday. It is Liesel's fault. What did she really wish, the foolish child?"

And the child has seated herself under the linden outside, and the mill stream rushes past her. Her eyes are fixed on the path on the other side of the water, which leads to the castle, and over there behind the dark tree-tops, there the proud moonlit tower rises to the night heavens as she has so often seen it, so innumerable times. Why did she feel so strangely this evening?

It was the unexpected meeting with her old playmate. Army had entered the arbor in which she and Nelly sat reading aloud to each other. Quite unexpectedly he stood there, and laughingly clasped his sister in his arms, who flushed crimson with delight, fairly could not speak; and then he looked at her quite astonished, and at length addressed her as "Miss Lieschen." "Miss Lieschen!" how that sounded. She must laugh, and he laughed with her, but he continued to call her so. He had grown larger and more stately since that winter evening when she saw him for the last

Digitized by Google

time, under the old, snowy linden; and now a bold little moustache covered his fresh mouth. How handsome

he really was! And now the evening of Nelly's birthday had passed so quickly; they had brought up all childish recollections, and he had been so gay, so

Digitized by Google

pleasant; his mother's face had lighted up so; and then, when she must leave, he had accompanied her; they had walked along the old linden alley together, and then the path to the mill bridge, just as at that time Auntie had with Christian; they had spoken of childhood days, and he had stopped at the mill bridge. "Good night, Miss Lieschen!" She must laugh again. "Good night, Mr. Army," she wished to say, but it would not cross her lips; she only hesitatingly held out her slender hand to him, which he took like an old acquaintance; and then he turned away and went, and she leaned over the railing and looked in the water, on which the moonlight trembled in silver bars, and heard the nightingales sing in the old lindens, as if in a dream.

"Will he come to the mill this time?" she asked herself now, and looked over at the castle. "Ah, yes, surely! If only mother does not to-morrow pay the long-spoken-of visit to the forester's wife!" thought she. "No, that would really be too bad; and I must go with her in any case."

And so she sat and dreamed under the old linden in the spring night, and in the young heart there was music like the song of the nightingales, and the moon smiled quietly down, as if she would not disturb the happy, youthful dream which every young heart dreams once; she knows that they pass away so easily, so easily!

Up in the castle a yellow light shone until late from the windows of the old baroness. She sat there in her black robe, leaning back in her arm-chair, and her hands played with the white handkerchief in her lap.

"And you say, Army," began she searchingly, to the yuong officer who sat opposite her, "Aunt Stontheim

Digitized by Google

herself expressed the wish that Blanche should visit us here?"

"No, dearest grandmamma, that would be saying too much," replied he. "Aunt Stontheim is a peculiar woman, she really never expresses a wish; she spoke of how the fatigue of the winter had affected Blanche, and asked me whether the air of our woods was good, whereupon I naturally understood the hint, and immediately offered our hospitality."

"Very precipitous, my dear Army. I must confess that to entertain a petted young lady here in this desolate, solitary castle seems a hard task to me. It is tasteless in the Stontheim to accept your offer, and especially for this Blanche. She can afterwards tell her father how Castle Derenberg entertains its guests." She laughed bitterly.

Army was silent; he watched a butterfly which fluttered around the glass globe of the lamp.

"What does she really look like, this Blanche?" asked the grandmother, after a pause.

Something like sunshine suddenly passed over Army's face. "How can I describe it to you, grandmamma? I can only tell you Blanche is an unusual apparition; one is dazzled when one sees her for the first time, and the oftener one sees her the more charms one discovers in her."

"That is the description of a lover," remarked the old lady, coolly. "To my knowledge, she never had any claims to beauty."

Army blushed deeply under the cold gaze of the great, dark eyes.

"She really is not beautiful, she has something so——"

Digitized by Google

"Enough!" the baroness interrupted him, impatiently. "Rather tell me what is thought of the relationship of the aunt to Blanche, and what the latter has to hope."

"She is considered aunt's sole heiress. In the two weeks of my stay there at Christmas, and at aunt's birthday, I did not notice any great fondness for each other."

The baroness raised her shoulders in a scornful movement, and, as if she wished to signify how little impression this made upon her, she asked: "And in what manner do you think to entertain the young lady here?"

"Oh, grandmamma, in your society; and then mamma and Nelly are here."

"Nelly? The poor thing, who can talk of nothing but flowers, birds and old village stories which she hears down there in the mill, where, alas! she runs every day."

"But I hope, just because the two girls are so different, they will learn to love each other," Army ventured to interpose. "Perhaps, through Blanche, Nelly will learn to know the pleasures of the world in Aunt Stontheim's house. I often spoke to her of the little one——"

"A watering place," declared the old lady irritably, "would probably be more desirable for the nerves of the young lady than our woods are. Have you already informed your mother of this pleasant plan for the near future?"

"No, neither mamma nor Nelly. First I did not wish to do so before I had discussed it with you, and secondly, the child from the mill was with Nelly——"

"Naturally. It is incomprehensible! I forbade her

Digitized by Google

presence when I was in the room, once for all; but, alas! she is everything to your mother and sister, who see in her an angel of goodness and beauty. But, Army, where in the world shall this Blanche stay? Where shall I get servants?"

"I thought of the room near yours, grandmamma, and picked out the tower room for a boudoir. The servants Blanche will bring with her, a maid——"

"The tower room? Never!" cried the old lady, starting up; her always pale face in this moment was of an almost ghostly pallor.

Army looked at her in alarm. "As you will, grandmamma!"

"Arrange that with your mother," she added, hastily. "Let Blanche stay where she wishes. The tower room remains locked as long as I live. Now go to rest," she then said, in a somewhat calmer tone. "To-morrow we will discuss it further."

Army bowed over her hand, and then went out. Without, in the echoing corridor, lay the moonlight, which fell through the many little panes of the high window full upon the white stone floor.

"Still the old story," said he, softly. "What does that mean about the tower room? And I had thought it would be so charming to arrange it for Blanche——"

"For Blanche!" He stood still for a moment; his thoughts flew back to the great city, to the elegant villa with the tall mirrors, and the flower-laden veranda. Up there in the second story, behind the lace curtains, she probably now lay and slept; she surely had no suspicion that the foolish cousin here in the old castle had spoken about her, had thought of her so late at night. He entered his room; the windows were opened, and

Digitized by Google

the breeze wafted a stream of fragrance of flowers towards him. He walked across the room, and looked out into the park, which lay peacefully there in the bright moonlight. Under the trees rested deep shadows, but the road and the large place before the house were brilliant, and a whole choir of nightingales sang in the bushes. The remembrance of a winter evening which he had passed here in the same room, yet unacquainted with life, timid before the future, came to his mind, and how the old proverb there on the mantel had so surprisingly brought him hope and courage. "Trust God for aye; luck comes each day." Had luck come to him? Ah, no; not luck itself, but its rays had touched him.

He must smile, and mentally he saw himself opposite Aunt Stontheim in the elegant room.

The old lady's invitation to the Christmas festivities had found him in D——, and when he kissed the hand which she held out to him in welcome, he had not looked very cordial. Tea was served to him, and the feeling that he would now be indescribably bored weighed upon him like a nightmare. Then all at once the portières had been drawn back and a girl's form stood before him, as if wafted into the room. The chandelier which hung from the ceiling threw its dazzling light on a little being who seemed of fairy-like delicacy, in the pale green crape dress, which was as if woven of mist, and which fell about her in transparent waves and folds. Dazzlingly white shoulders rose from these waves, and over the white, small forehead, and waving down her back in heavy abundance, with golden light, was luxuriant, wonderful red hair.

He had sprung up and stared at her as if he saw a

Digitized by Google

ghost. The young lady threw her splendid bouquet of white camelias on the table, hurried past him, and greeted his aunt.

"Agnes!" he thought; "the beautiful Agnes Mechthilde from the ancestral hall at home."

"Is it so late already?" asked the aunt, casting a scrutinizing glance over the charming form; and then, pointing to him, she said: "Dear Blanche, your cousin, Armand von Derenberg, who will be our guest for the holidays."

The young lady glanced quickly at him with a pair of dark eyes; he still looked at her, he could not help it; she, indeed, stood before him—the beautiful Agnes Mechthilde—as if she had descended from her gilt frame. Yes, certainly, he had behaved very awkwardly; the blood even now mounted feverishly to his head when he thought of it. Then, at his aunt's request, he had breathlessly dressed, sat opposite to the ladies in a silk-cushioned carriage, and entered brilliantly lighted rooms; he had flown over the mirror-like parquet with Blanche in the dance, had talked with her, and told her that at home, in the castle, a picture hung in the ancestral hall which looked so like her, and before which as a boy he had stood for hours and gazed at it without wearying.

She had smiled at that, and said she would like to make a trial, and stand near it in order to see if the similarity were not greatly in imagination. To be sure, she had not the eyes, the deeply melancholy eyes, although they were dark; but this unfathomable sadness was not in them. How, indeed, was that possible? She was so young, so gay, so admired! He followed her with his eyes when she passed him in the dance;

Digitized by Google

her loosened hair surrounded her pale little face like a golden veil. He could not look enough at this wonderful ornament; he envied every other who danced with her, and looked forward to the holy evening for whose celebration he had really come, and which would surely be passed quietly at home. But just then she had pleased him least of all, not that she looked less charming—certainly not. The golden veil lay so wonderfully over the dark blue silken stuff of her gown; the candles of the Christmas tree called up shining sparks in it, but the radiant smile was lacking, which makes a face truly bewitching. He completely missed the lovely Christmas joy in Blanche's black eyes.

And then *fête* followed *fête*, and at last he must leave, however hard it was for him. He begged the aunt to be allowed to come again soon, and in his breast-pocket he carried a dainty Russian leather cigar-case, a keepsake from his cousin; that had been his treasure, for within lay a long strand of soft red hair. She gave him the hair in joke, at his request, so that he could compare it, and see which was the more golden, that in the picture in the ancestral hall or hers.

The young officer at the open window hurriedly drew out the case, and in the moonlight surveyed the lock, which at top and bottom was fastened with a dainty blue ribbon; he pressed it to his lips, and a whole crowd of enchanting pictures of the future passed through his mind. He saw himself again in the castle of his father; she stood near him in the summer night, her golden head on his breast ; and outside, in the old stone basin, after a long, sad time, again rose a fresh column of water, commencing new, happy life.

How beautiful was the dream of the future! But it

Digitized by Google

was only a dream, and the reality! Army shuddered; it made demands of him which fairly frightened him, this desolate, unhappy reality. Where obtain the

means to lend some brilliancy and light to the sad need in Castle Derenberg for the beautiful guest? The money, oh, the hateful money!

He looked dreamily out into the park. The night

Digitized by Google

wind had risen and whispered through the trees. "It is time to sleep," he said, closing the window. In dreams the beautiful Agnes Mechthilde appeared to him; she stood before him in the silver brocade robe, and over it fell her hair like a golden veil. She looked at him with her great, sad eyes, and raised her hand in warning. "But beware what colored hair. If 'tis red, great danger's there," rang in his ears.

Digitized by Google

VI.

"Army, how happy I am to be able to have a guest for once," said Nelly to her brother the next morning, as he walked at her side through the dewy, fresh, green park. "What will Lieschen say? I must tell her. Tell me, Army," she asked, coaxingly, and leaned against him, "how does Lieschen please you? Has she not grown wonderfully pretty?"

"I really do not know," he replied absently. "I did not notice at all; yes, I believe I scarcely remember——"

"Why, Army!" came reproachfully from his sister; "You are absent-minded, or quite sad. Has anything unpleasant happened to you? Can I perhaps help you?"

"No, little sister," laughed he, and passed his hand jestingly over her blooming face. "You can help me least of all. It is a fatal affair. I am afraid to tell mamma, but cannot do otherwise."

"Oh, do not tell mamma, Army," begged the young girl, standing still. She laid her little hand on his shoulder, and her eyes hung anxiously on her brother's face. "Please do not. She is so ill, and works so much. Ah, please do not tell her if it is anything unpleasant——"

A slight embarrassment was expressed in the young man's face.

Digitized by Google

"But, Heavens!" said he; "what shall I do? I cannot turn to grandmamma; it would be in vain, for she really is not in a position to help me——" he hesitated; "and, secondly, I do not want to put her in a still worse humor; she is very little pleased with the expected visit."

"Army," whispered the girl, guessing the cause of his embarrassment, and came nearer to him, "I believe I can help you. Wait a single moment—or, no, go on to the large maple tree by the lake, I will be there at once." And hurriedly she ran back down the shady path; the sunbeams fell on her simple, light dress, and shone on the blonde curls; soon she had vanished round the nearest turn of the path.

The young man looked after her, and then walked on. What did she want? She could not possibly know. He then sat down on the stone bench and looked at the clear water, in which the blue sky and the tall trees were reflected so charmingly. "How beautiful it is here!" said he, half aloud. "If she only has a little fondness for natural beauty, it must please her here."

Then soft steps sounded behind him, and, turning round, he looked in his sister's face, flushed with joy.

"There, Army," said she, growing still redder, and laid a dainty little silk purse in his hand. "I really do not need it; no, really and truly. Why should I? And now you will not tell mamma anything, will you?" The joy of being able to give something shone out from the lovely girl's blue eyes. "Dear, good Army," begged she, "put it away quickly. It will certainly be enough."

Digitized by Google

"No, Nelly; no!" cried he, flushing crimson. "Your savings——"

She held her hand over his mouth. "You make me

angry, Army," cried she. "If brother and sister cannot help each other!—who knows, I may come to you some time. Now let us go on; say no more about it. See, what do you think if we should have a boat here? I have long wished it; then we conld row with Blanche and Lieschen, could we not? Blanche will not be proud?"

He did not answer; at this moment he seemed to

Digitized by Google

himself quite contemptible. Hastily he turned away his face.

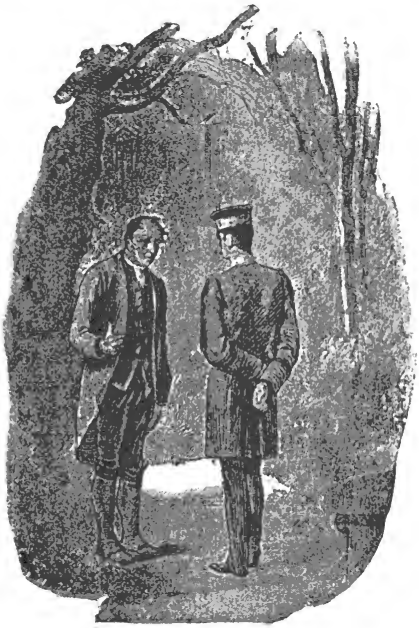
His sister remarked it. "Army," said she, "come back soon. I must now hurry to mamma, and"—nothing occurred to her that she should do with mamma—"I am in a hurry," cried she, and took the nearest path to the castle.

He followed her slowly in shame such as he had never known before. Yesterday he had not even given her a trifle for a birthday present, and to-day she joyfully gave him her saved treasure. He stood still and opened the little silk purse; a couple of dollars lay therein, and something else wrapped in paper; he unwrapped it, and found a gold piece, also a few words written on the paper in his mother's handwriting: "For a new dress for my Nelly," he read. The young girl had evidently not noticed the words, or else she would have spared him the mortification; he thought of the faded dress which she had worn yesterday and to-day, and how she must have rejoiced at the idea of a new one. A new dress for five dollars! The bouquet which he recently sent Blanche, and which probably on the morning after the ball she had thrown carelessly aside, had cost that much. He thought of the dainty figure which had never seemed dressed in any but the heaviest silk or misty crape. What contrasts life offered! There lay the castle before him, so imposing with its gigantic façade, its towers, and the son of this proud house possessed not so much as—oh, it was distracting!

He quickly turned and walked back; his eyes involuntarily wandered over the wooded valley, and remained resting on the slate roof of the paper mill. He suddenly laughed aloud. "Yes, they have so much the

Digitized by Google

more," said he, in an undertone; "one need only condescend to millers and the like, and gold flows to one in streams, and all that will fill the hand of the little girl with whom I once played. The rag-miller's Lieschen is the wealthiest heiress in the whole region—really laughable, but such is life." In his dark eyes, however, there was no laughter; he looked indescribably



depressed, the handsome young officer. His sistesr' money burned his hands like fire, while he hastily

Digitized by Google

strode on, his lips scornfully pressed together. The beautiful dream of the future had flown before the oppressing present, and the uncomfortableness of his pecuniary affairs had overpowered him with full force. He took the little note with his mother's words and laid it in his pocket-book; then he walked on again, and discovered, turning into the main path, old Henry, who came to meet him as quickly as his weary limbs would permit him.

"The baroness, your grandmother, requests the lieutenant to come to her at once," announced he, looking pleasantly into the young man's excited face.

The old baroness walked hastily up and down in her room. Her proud face was flushed slightly, and her dark eyes glanced impatiently at the red hangings of the door through which her grandson must come. Her hand held an open letter, and from time to time she stood still and glanced at the paper.

"It is incredible," said she softly; "these Königsberg Derenbergs! To settle it thus, *Dio mio!* What doses the Stontheim gives me in this short letter! And yet one must thank God that the matter arranges itself thus. How happy I am that, in spite of the coolness prevailing between us, I insisted that Army should introduce himself to her." She glanced again at the letter in her hand.

"In Armand," she read, "I have made the acquaintance of a nice, lovable man, a young cavalier wholly of the Derenberg character; and in spite of the short time of our acquaintance I have learned to love him heartily."

The lips of the old lady curled scornfully.

"I am, as you know from former times," she read on,

Digitized by Google

"a woman who always honestly and plainly expresses her opinion—that we both never understood each other lay in the too great difference of our views; to-day we are both old women, dearest Derenberg, and it is surely time to make peace for the short remnant of life which is still ours. I offer you my hand, therefore; let the past be forgotten. The fault was probably on both sides. And now I should like to make you the confidante of a pet wish of mine, which concerns Armand. From him you already know that a young relative lives in my house, who, motherless, now fills the place of a daughter in my solitary life, and whom I love as if she really were one. If all does not deceive me, Armand is not indifferent to his cousin. I should be truly glad, dearest Derenberg, if the two learned to love each other; and, in order to offer the opportunity, I send Blanche, under the pretext of restoring her health, to your lonely, wood-encircled home. May the two young hearts there find each other, so that I may yet greet in Armand a son. You are a clever woman, dearest Derenberg, and I do not need to ask you to give the young people no hint of my wishes. I hope that they will approach each other from true liking; it is possible that Blanche's clever little head suspects my intentions; I have not confided them to her. And now may God care for the rest, and bring it about to our joy. While in spirit I once more offer you the hand of reconciliation, in the hope of a speedy reply, I am, dearest Derenberg, your Ernestine, Countess Stontheim, *née* Derenberg."

"It is really magnanimous," added the old lady, "and one must truly put on a good face to this bad trick; it is refined in Stontheim, but she was always so.

Digitized by Google

Blanche is her heiress, that is clear, and now that she has learned to know the boy, she would like to arrange the affair in a good manner. I must bite this sour apple with a sweet expression, and thank God that it comes about thus! She is a malicious creature, this Stontheim. But I must certainly give him a hint; it seems that this Blanche is not indifferent to him, and——"

At this moment Army entered the room. The grandmother looked at him pleasantly.

"I have a letter from the Stontheim," said she, standing and offering him her hand. "She announces Blanche; and now, my heart, forget that yesterday I was so unfriendly in regard to your plans. I had a slight headache, and that put me out of temper; I am really pleased at the visit of the young lady."

Army, who had just raised his curly head from her hand, looked up radiantly into his grandmother's face. "Really, grandmamma? Thank you; you take a hundredweight off my mind; it was very unpleasant for me that a burden was laid upon you which did not please you. May I hear what else aunt writes?"

The old lady smiled. "No, my heart," said she, "it is not good for one to hear too much flattery about himself."

"Aunt likes me?" he asked, quite excited, and twisted his bold little moustache.

"Aunt thinks you are a good, sensible boy, and will certainly become a true old Derenberg."

Army's face clouded. "Is that all?"

"Especially if," came roguishly from his grandmother's lips, "if a beautiful, beloved wife stands at your side."

"Did she write that?" cried he hastily, and blush-

Digitized by Google

ing, while he impetuously seized her hands. "Best of grandmothers, be good! Tell me, did she say anything of her—of Blanche? Does she think that Blanche loves me, too?"

"Army! Heavens, how indelicate! Be moderate. Who speaks of Blanche? I said nothing—do you understand?—nothing at all. Who thinks so? You are only twenty-one years old."

But Army had thrown his arms round his grandmother's neck, and, in spite of her resistance, pressed a couple of hearty kisses on her mouth, and then, unceremoniously, he rushed from the room.

"*Orribile!*" said the old lady, straightening her lace cap; "he must already love her quite fearfully. If Stontheim had seen him now she would scarcely still believe in the Derenberg character." She stood there thoughtfully, and seemed to seek something in the past, of which what she had just experienced reminded her. Suddenly a recollection of better days rose to her mind. She saw herself a young, beautiful girl; how in happy enthusiasm she fell on the neck of her half blind duenna and kissed her stormily. And why? Because outside in the soft evening air, on the balcony under the blooming oleanders, a slender, blond man, in strange-sounding Italian, had told her so much of an old German castle in the midst of green forests of oak, and of an old German woman with faithful blue eyes. A gentle expression lay about her mouth as she thought of the joy of her young heart. "He has my blood in his veins," said she. "God grant that life may more faithfully fulfil his wishes than it did mine!" Then she sat down in the arm-chair before her writing-table, and painted to herself the future which just began to dawn

Digitized by Google

in rosy light; and before the eyes of the thoughtful woman again stood the old castle in all the charm which once surrounded it.

Meanwhile Army rushed about the park in stormy

unrest. He had first almost smothered his sister, and whispered something incomprehensible to her of a new dress, a blue one such as Blanche wore. He had spoken to his mother, who could not at all comprehend her son's excited manner, of the necessity of benefiting her suffering health by a visit to a watering-place, and if it were not this, then certainly next year. He had then, with Nelly and old Henry, gone through the rooms which he had selected for Blanche, and had arranged

Digitized by Google

this, and commanded that his sister must promise him her sewing-table, and the mother's flower-stand; then he had condemned the hangings and the pictures; had taken out the latter and hung others there, and declared many times to Nelly that he would order curtains and rugs from his garrison instead of the old faded stuff, and also a new livery for Henry. At last, he embraced his sister, and asked whether she really believed that the place would please Blanche a little, and whether she did not think that the loveliest view

was to be had from this room. And without waiting for her answer, he added: "Oh, little sister, how astonished you will be when you see her, how astonished you will be!" Thereupon he went out into the old

Digitized by Google

park, and now wandered with hasty steps through the over-grown paths; he longed for the time of departure, in order to be able to tell her how pleased they were at home, at her visit; and at length it was evening, and after a short farewell, with a "Happy meeting again!" spoken from a full heart, he strode out into the perfumed spring night to the little village to take the post. At the park gate he picked a full cluster of elder, a greeting from his home for Blanche. And at length the postilion blew, and he drove out into the quiet country with a thousand happy thoughts.

But down there in the mill a window was softly opened, and a girl's brown head leaned out, and with moist, longing eyes looked down the village road. She knew that he would leave this evening; he had told her so himself, and she had waited and waited for him the whole day, but he had not come. And hark! there rang out the post-horn into the quiet night. How sadly that sounded! An echo came back from the woods, and gently, very gently, the window was closed again.

Digitized by Google

VII.

THE next day it stormed. The sky was a uniform dull gray, and a soft rain fell on the apple and elder blossoms. But Lieschen stood in her room in the afternoon, and with a sad expression looked over the wet garden to the castle, whose towers seemed wrapped in a gray veil.

To-day had been such a contrary one—every one looked cross; something unpleasant had occurred in her father's business. Auntie was vexed because Dorte had not closed the stable door behind which was the hen with her seven little chicks, who now were all out walking in the rain, which was contrary to every rule; the little things now would have rough feathers, she prophesied, and there they sat with protruding eyes. Dorte had had a severe scolding, and now went around the house quite disconsolate, and with red eyes; and besides all that, to-day young Mr. Selldorf had arrived, who wished to go into her father's business, and had dined with the family. Usually the men of business ate in the house which they lived in, for Mr. Erving did not like to have his family circle disturbed; but to-day he made an exception, because he was intimately acquainted with the young man's father. So the blond-haired man, with the great blue cravat, had sat there opposite Liesel and stared at her, which was certainly not at all necessary, and then the conversation

Digitized by Google

had turned on his father, and his mother's health; and that had all been so fearfully tiresome. Besides that, Lieschen had forgotten to feed her doves for the first time since she had taken this duty upon herself, and now she was vexed with herself. What was the matter with her? And then she thought of yesterday, when she had sat with her work under the linden before the front door until it was dark, and every time that a figure appeared there between the trees she had started, and her heart had beat violently, and then it had always been some indifferent person who came along the road; last of all, the old shepherdess, Marie, who was always begging, and then—she had gone upstairs and wept.

She shook her head displeasedly when she must confess that to herself, and blushed again and again when she now thought how yesterday evening she had risen because her thoughts would not let her sleep, and opened the window to listen for the post-horn which the postilion blew from the box of the coach in which Army—yes, Army—had driven away again so soon.

Now she really must take her work and go down and sit with her mother in the sitting-room; but no, she could not; she would rather stay upstairs, for Auntie would ask her again why she was so sad. And she, least of all, should know the reason, for then she would immediately say: "Yes, yes; that does not surprise me at all, for they are so proud up in the castle that they think chairs and benches must bow before them. Who was right?" No, she would stay quietly up here and read a little.

"Why is it such horrible weather?" said she suddenly aloud, while she took down Geibel's poems from the book-shelves, "or else Nelly would come down."

Digitized by Google

She seated herself on the little sofa, rested her head in her hand, and turned over the leaves of the book, without having more than a passing glance for the charming poems, which she usually so loved to read. Then she quickly raised her head and turned it toward the door, listening, and, truly, there came the well-known step of Auntie along the hall, and immediately after the good face, under the snow-white cap, looked in at the door.

"Well, for Heaven's sake, Liesel, where are you hiding?" asked she. "All day you have had a regular vinegar face, and now you sit here and read instead of helping old Auntie downstairs a little. You know that to-day is Thursday, when the pastor and his family come. Dorte is fairly hateful on account of the scolding she got, and Minnie grumbles with her for company. You might have helped with the pigeons or fixed the asparagus; that is not so easy, and you need to know how for your future housekeeping, for when the wife superintends all goes well. But it is a pleasure—how pretty it is here!" she interrupted herself, while she surveyed the charming room—which was a true girl's chamber, with its white lacquered furniture, upholstered with blue and white cretonne, and the filmy window curtains. "And see how the ivy grows there! Yes, something occurs to me that I wanted up here. Here, Nelly has sent you a note. Henry brought it." She took a letter from the linen pocket which she wore under her apron, and handed it to the young girl, who quickly opened it and read.

"Only think, Auntie," said she, surprised; "they are to have a visitor at the castle! Nelly is very pleased. It is a cousin, Blanche von Derenberg, and Army is

Digitized by Google

coming on furlough, and I must visit them very often."

"So?" asked the old woman.

"Yes; Nelly writes she would have told it me herself, but to-day she has no time to come, for she must help put the rooms in order."

"They have certainly just learned it?" said the old woman.

"Oh, no," said Liesel. "Army was here for that reason, writes Nelly."

"Army has been here?" asked the old Auntie, and looked in astonishment at the young girl, who had suddenly flushed a deep red. "When, then?"

"On Nelly's birthday," came back softly.

"Oh, think of that! And you did not say a word about it, Liesel. You used to tell me everything!" Something like anxiety was in the old woman's voice. "Tell me, Lieschen, why were you silent?" she said again, quickly.

"Because I did not want to hear you say again that he has grown proud and arrogant."

"And why did you not wish to hear that, Liesel?"

"Because it is not true," cried she violently; "because he only did not have time, or else he would have come."

She suddenly burst into tears. All yesterday's disappointment flowed with these bitter tears from the heart of the young girl.

"But, Liesel, my goodness! what does this mean? It is not sensible in you to cry about such a thing. What in the world does it matter to you about Army?" The old woman spoke vexedly, but one could see that a load had suddenly fallen upon her heart. "I thought it was quite indifferent to you," she continued, "what

Digitized by Google

I said about Army. Your way and his no longer run near each other, as in your childhood. He is now a young gentleman, and you a grown girl. What can one think when you begin to cry so?"

But Lieschen threw herself on the old woman's neck.

"Ah, Auntie, do not be vexed!" she sobbed. "It is very childish in me; but I cannot hear you speak about those of the castle. We always played together so prettily, and it seems to me as if you pitilessly wiped away the lovely recollections when you are angry with Nelly and Army."

Digitized by Google

Auntie shook her head. "Child," then said she, "if you knew what bitter misery had come to our house from up there!"

"But can Army and Nelly help it?"

"No—but——"

"You always say, yourself, one should forgive one's enemies."

"It is true, but it is too hard to forgive a wrong when it touches one as nearly as——"

"Ah, never mind, Auntie," begged Lieschen, coaxingly, and smiled behind her tears up into her face. "I will not cry so foolishly again, but you will not scold any more, eh? Now I will come downstairs and help you roast the pigeons brown and crisp, as father likes them. Yes? And have you already gotten radishes from the garden, or shall I do it?" She coaxed and teased until the old woman pressed a kiss on her mouth, and when they then crossed the dim hall of the upper story, in which stood massive old clothes and linen presses, Auntie involuntarily glanced at one of the doors, and a slight sigh accompanied the glance.

"What is that room?" asked Lieschen, who only once, as a little girl, had looked into it, but often saw Auntie go in, and she always locked the door behind her and stayed there a long while. "What is that room?"

"That was Lisette's room," replied the old woman.

The young girl nodded and ran quickly downstairs. She had indeed often heard something of Lisette; she knew that she was her great-aunt, and Auntie always spoke her name with a certain solemnity; but as they had never told her anything else about her, she was not interested to know that that had been her room. But

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

now she was ashamed of having cried so childishly before Auntie. What would she really think? Probably that she—— She blushed deeply, and did not finish her sentence, but began to sing, while she ran into the sitting-room to greet the pastor and his wife.

But Auntie followed her with startled eyes. "Merciful Heaven," thought she, "graciously spare us such a second misfortune! For it will be a misfortune. Nothing good has ever yet come from there since the old woman has been in the castle. O God, guard the girl's thoughts! She herself does not yet know it; but it is true what I heard then—she likes him, Army. Oh dear Heaven, what can we do to help it?"

And Auntie worried and worried, while she prepared supper in the spotless kitchen; and when she heard Lieschen's clear voice from the sitting-room she shook her head; and at supper she secretly watched the laughing face, from which the last traces of tears had disappeared.

But it was a happy circle which sat in the cool dining-room, around the large round table covered with snowy damask. The host at the head, with his handsome, kindly face framed by a heavy full beard; the pastor, in whom one could see how he liked to be the guest of the friend of his youth; and Rosine, his round little wife, who was always cheerful, although she had a whole row of children at home, who followed each other like the pipes of an organ, and for whom she often did not know where she should get their new dresses and jackets. Every Thursday evening at the mill, where she was to rest from the exertions of the week, she scarcely could sit on the sofa by the hostess without a child's stocking in her hand, on which she

Digitized by Google

zealously knit; and often Mrs. Erving then smilingly laid a whole package of finished ones in her lap. "So, dear Rosine, I have helped you a little there; now leave your knitting alone for this evening, and sing us a song!" And then the pastor's wife, in her high, light voice, sang some simple song. But afterwards she mechanically seized her knitting again, and said, smiling at it herself: "Never mind, Minna! I cannot help it." The hostess was particularly well this evening, and she and Rosine told each other long stories of housekeeping; and Lieschen joked with her father and the pastor. Only Auntie was quiet, and this evening had not even a smile for the praises of her cooking, and did not take a sip of the fragrant Moselle wine which stood before her so temptingly in the green glass.

"Do you know, pastor," asked the host, "that I now have a son of our old school friend, Selldorf, here?"

"Oh, is it possible! And the boy is to——"

"The boy is to put his nose in my business, for the old man intends to start a paper factory—*vulgo*, rag mill; besides, has had good fortune; he entered as book-keeper the business which he now owns; married the only daughter of his principal, and was a made man. He is a clever fellow, and a thoroughly genuine character. You must see the boy; strikingly like the old fellow at that time—the same curly light hair, the same eyes. I thought I was young again when he stood before me."

"Where do you have him?"

"Down there in the business house. I do not treat him by a hair differently from the other young people. This noon he dined here, but that is all. You know I do not like my family circle disturbed."

Digitized by Google

The pastor nodded. "I really must see him. But what does Lieschen say to this?" he asked the young girl jokingly.

"Nothing at all, uncle," replied she.

"That is very little," laughed he. "But, *apropos*, it occurs to me, Lieschen, that Army was here. I saw him come from the post, where he had just arrived, *à la bonheur*. He has grown to be a handsome boy. Did you see him, little one?"

Lieschen nodded, but she had grown crimson. Auntie looked sharply over at her.

"But it vexes me," continued the pastor, "that he does not think it worth while to come and see us once. It is not nice in him not to know his old tutor. That is a trace of the old baroness."

"Yes, that is so, Bernhard," jested Erving. "Ingratitude is the reward of the world. He probably cherishes it against you for having sometimes pulled his ears."

"I pull his ears! Ah, Erving, then you little know the boy. I think if I had touched him he would have flown at my head. Hey, how his black eyes sparkled! Do you know, Lieschen, how you wished to correct him when he, in our Bible lesson, had not learned the hundredth psalm correctly?"

"Yes, he has his grandmother's pride," assented Mrs. Rosine.

"Well, that would be no bad sign," said Erving.

"You alone cannot complain," said the hostess. "He has not been here again, either. But Nelly comes to us."

"A very lovely girl," said the pastor's wife.

"Just like her grandfather," now was heard Auntie's

Digitized by Google

voice. "He was a man. Well, yet whom our Lord loves he gives great suffering."

"He surely lived very unhappily with his wife?" asked the pastor's wife, turning to the old woman.

"Oh, ma'am, where she enters comes misfortune; she not only ruined her own family but she also brought care and sorrow to other houses."

"Yes, she must have managed very badly," said the clergyman. "One hears something of the sort among the village people."

"My family can sing such a song, eh, Auntie?" said the host.

"God knows it!" cried the old woman. "What tears have fallen on this woman's account! But God has counted them all," she nodded, rising quickly, and left the room.

"It would do no harm," murmured she, as she entered her room, and once more pondered over what troubled her so; "it would do no harm if I should tell Liesel the story; it may give her some idea as to what they are up there."

Then she rose, took a key, walked softly out of the room, up the stairs, and opened the door of Lisette's room.

It was a small room which she entered, and in the twilight which already prevailed, one could scarcely perceive the simple furnishings. Between the windows a bureau, with shining brass handles; over that a mirror in a carved wood frame, of strange form at the top; a small bedstead, green, painted with a fat garland of roses; before that a tiny table with three legs, and an inlaid star on its top, and against the opposite wall a high-backed, thin-legged sofa, which audibly creaked

Digitized by Google

when Auntie now sat down on it. Over the bed hung a little black crucifix, under a gay picture which represented a girl with a dove on her hand; between bed and window a clothes-press, with inlaid figures of dark wood, found a place; while at the other window stood a little sewing-table, with a high-backed chair before it. Under the mirror hung a withered wreath, with a faded blue ribbon, which contrasted strangely with the fresh, fragrant bouquet of elder blossoms in the old polished glass on the bureau. This token of love Auntie placed here every year when the elder bloomed; the former inmate of this room had loved the blue blossoms so dearly, and at this time a painfully sweet remembrance woke in the old woman's heart.

So she sat there now this evening again, in the beautiful Lisette's room, and in her soul the past and the present mingled; it seemed to her that she was once more the fresh young girl, and the slender form of her friend again stood over there at the window, and her beautiful eyes looked so longingly over at the southern tower of the castle. "He is coming, Marie; he is coming. I have seen the light," she had once so often called; and then, in rapture, clapped her hands, and gone down into the garden; and there, in the dark jasmine arbor, had sat a beautiful, happy pair of lovers in all chastity and honor.

And then?

There she lay on that bed, the beautiful form broken under the load of pain, the cheeks snow white, and the blue eyes full of the hottest glow of fever.

Was it not enough to be forced to see such torment once? "O God, protect my darling, my Liesel!" prayed, she, and laid her head on the back

Digitized by Google

of the sofa, and her hands sank in her lap, tightly folded, while tears came to the old eyes.

Then a pair of little hands seized hers; a soft cheek leaned against hers, and when she looked up a pair of deep blue eyes looked at her, and a soft voice asked: "Why are you crying, Auntie? Are you still angry with me?"

The old woman did not immediately answer; it seemed to her that at this moment she saw a lovely vision, but then she asked: "How did you come here, Liesel?"

"Forgive me, Auntie! I looked for you in your room downstairs; they were talking so much about a Baron Fritz and great-aunt Lisette, and then I wanted to ask you to tell me something about them, and came up here after you."

"Then you have come at a good hour, Liesel. Let them talk downstairs; no one knows about it as well as I do, for I experienced it. Truly, I did not wish you to know for a long time how sad life often is; but it is better for you—come, sit down!"

The young girl obeyed, after she had shyly looked round the room, and the old woman smoothed her apron; and while she folded her hands again she prepared to speak. But then she was silent, and looked around her as if embarrassed. Should she tell the young girl the sad story, and bring hatred and rage and confused distrust into her pure heart? The girl who sat there near her, in silent expectation, was still a child. Army would surely soon pass out of her thoughts. No, she dared not relate this tearful story. And still, if it should be repeated, and she had not warned her darling! "Oh, all merciful God!" murmured she, softly, "what can I do?"

Digitized by Google

"Open the window first, Liesel," asked she; "the air is so close here!"

The young girl opened both windows; the rain had ceased, only a slight gentle dropping from leaf to leaf in the old trees was heard, and that fresh, earthy smell which always fills the air after a rain, came into the room.

"Liesel," said she softly.

"Auntie?" asked the young girl, and stroked the old face.

"Liesel, you—I believe it would be better if you did not go to see Nelly so often—afterwards, I mean later, when Army is there again, and the cousin." She corrected herself, as Lieschen turned her face to her with an expression of surprise. "See, it is not—I think—I ——" she hesitated, and was silent.

"Never mind that; rather tell me about Lisette," coaxed the young girl, in the fear that Auntie might again return to the dreaded theme of before.

"What I would tell you of Lisette," cried the old woman hastily, "I tell you she was the loveliest creature on God's earth, and she died because — because —listen. Liesel, if any one ever says anything about your great-aunt, then contradict it, for there was never a purer heart, and also never one that was broken in such a shameful manner——"

It sounded so passionately excited that the young girl did not venture to question.

"Do not go to the castle any more, Liesel," she continued, while she seized the girl's hand and pressed it tightly. "See; I cannot tell you how it all was; it will not pass my lips. Later you shall learn it; but believe me, it does you no good; the old baroness—she——"

Digitized by Google

"Has that anything to do with the story of Aunt Lisette?" asked the young girl. "Tell me, Auntie, please, please!"

"I will tell you neither yes nor no, Liesel," replied she; "but this I tell you," said she solemnly; "it is not always evening, and if things went worse with her on earth, and she came here before the house as a beggar, I would drive her away and let her go further; for where she enters is accursed for evermore; and once in life I will yet tell her that to her face, that she——"

"Auntie!" cried Lieschen, with a repellant gesture, so frightened and so loud that the old woman hushed in alarm.

"It is good," she murmured. "I will say nothing more. But you shall not be as unhappy as Lisette. I could not again live through it if—ah, my God! child, I did not wish to pain you, I only wished to warn you, Lieschen," she continued, as she drew the sobbing girl to her breast; "you shall not miss your friend, not for anything in the world; but see, when one is young, sometimes very foolish thoughts come into the head. Lieschen, child," she whispered anxiously, "you feel that I mean well with you, do you not?"

Lieschen nodded. "Yes, I know that you mean well, Auntie, but——" She was silent. She felt so sad, so sad as she had never before felt in life.

Down in the sitting-room they were still talking together of old times, of the beautiful Lisette and Baron Fritz; and soon the pastor's little wife rose, seated herself at the piano, and sang, in her tender voice, an old song.

"Where is our Lieschen?" she asked. "She must sing, too."

Digitized by Google

And Lieschen still sat upstairs near Auntie, and when she heard the song downstairs she cried, and did not herself know why. It seemed as if a mist sank down before her eyes, concealing all the golden time of youth, with all the happy games, with sunshine and blossoms; and two laughing children's faces disappeared more and more, and the mist grew thicker and thicker, and built itself into a high wall, and before it stood the proud, beautiful mistress of the castle from the ancestral hall over yonder, with her wonderful black eyes, and the blue velvet gown, and she stretched out her hands repellantly. "What do you want here? This is consecrated ground, and you do not belong to us. You are the rag-miller's Lieschen; turn back, or else it will be your death. Think of Lisette, the beautiful Lisette, and——". Then she hastily sprang up and fled from the room, and into her own; and there she threw herself on the bed and wept in hottest grief for something which she herself as yet scarcely comprehended, and which now, with its disappearance, made her life seem so empty—so sad.

But Auntie stood at her door, and listened to the timid sobbing within. "Oh, heavens!" said she, softly; "I judged rightly. She loves him—Army. If it may only be that I have warned her at the right time! It is better to weep now than then. You poor thing! Yes, such a first love is quite too sweet——"

And downstairs the guests were just leaving, and Auntie plainly heard the words which were spoken for good night. "Yes, yes, Bernhard, such is life," said the pastor in conclusion of some conversation which had preceded. "It has misery and happiness. Ah, when we now sit here as old people, and tell of some-

Digitized by Google

thing of past days, let us hope it will not be so sad as the story of this evening, and we can then tell our grandchildren: 'See, children, we fared better than we deserved.' Ah, Bernhard, I already see you as a grandfather, and Lieschen at the side of a good husband, here at the mill—it all seems like the present. Now, God keep you; farewell until Whit-Sunday, the second feast day; the third you come to us, eh, Rosine?"

"Good night, good night! Greet Lieschen and Auntie!"

And it was quiet in the house; only in Lieschen's room the soft sobbing was not yet hushed, and it was late when the old woman went down the stairs and into her little room. "Now she sleeps," she murmured. "God give her a happy awakening and new pleasure in life, and some time much love and blessing! She is still so young, so young, and life is so sad and long; yes, for most people, for the most."

Digitized by Google

VIII.

THE Saturday before Whit-Sunday had come; the sun shone smilingly and golden from the blue heavens down on the earth, kissed many little roses awake in the miller's garden, looked through the fresh white curtains into the rooms, and burned hotly on the sandstone bench before the house door. Auntie stood in the garden and picked flowers into her apron. Lieschen helped her; she wore a large round straw hat, and garden gloves were on her little hands, and she selected and cut the loveliest flowers.

Her face had a changed expression; especially the eyes looked quite different from formerly, and not as happy as was suited to such a blue, laughing spring day, and Auntie was more tender to her than before. From the roof a couple of swallows flew twittering past her, and then rose high up into the blue ether; and from the kitchen window sounded the gay talk of Dorte and Minna, who were making plans for the morrow; and would their lovers leave a May-basket before their windows? All was spick and span in the house; even the windows of the old-fashioned rooms upstairs were open, to let in the fresh air of heaven, and everywhere there was an odor of cake. Over in the office and in the factory rooms the clapping and stamping of the machines

Digitized by Google

had ceased early; the workmen, also, were resting at home for the feast day. Mr. Erving gladly gave them such a holiday; afterwards they went to work all the happier.

The book-keeper and the two other young men from the office had gone away early this morning to make a little Whitsun tour; only Mr. Selldorf had remained behind, and looked forward to the pleasant feast day. Whit-Sunday in the country was something wholly new for him; and so, highly satisfied, he walked up and down the elm walk beside the mill stream, and revelled in the sunbeams which lit up the water down to the bottom of the stream, and in the crowd of little fish who shot in and out among each other in such sunny places; and at times he secretly looked over at the garden to see whether a large white straw hat, with corn-flower blue ribbons, would appear again, under which looked out a pair of the loveliest deep blue eyes which he had ever seen in his life.

At the open window of the sitting-room, which looked out into the garden, sat Mrs. Erving, and sewed sky-blue ribbons on a white dress for her Lieschen for the festival. She had beckoned to her husband, who had just entered, and now showed him the two figures out among the flowers in the garden.

"See, Erving, how Auntie pets the girl," she said, smiling. "She has always spoiled her, but since some time it is much worse; since Liesel looked so pale for a few days recently, she fairly carries the child on her hands."

"Never mind, Minna," replied Erving. "She was really brought up by Auntie; but, you are right. She looked a little pale, Liesel; and do you know what

Digitized by Google

occurred to me? She has not been to the castle for a whole week, and Nelly has been here three times already."

"Oh, well, those are girlish caprices. Perhaps they have had some quarrel—the two; but she will surely go to-morrow. I think she spoke of it."

"To-morrow?" asked Erving. "H'm; Selldorf is to be our guest then; what shall we two do with him alone?"

"Oh, she will not stay up there long. They have guests at the castle—the cousin of whom Nelly spoke, and Army; but Lieschen has always gone, until now, and wished them a happy feast day, so she can scarcely omit it at this time," said Mrs. Erving, coaxingly.

He nodded absently. "He is a nice fellow, this Selldorf," said he, then. His wife looked at him and smiled, and he smiled back.

"Now I know what you are thinking of, old fellow," said she, happily.

He stooped down to her. "Really, Minna? Well, and would it be so bad, then? See, I must have a son-in-law sometime who is fitted for the business, and he is a fine fellow. I have learned to know him—the same upright character as his father."

"Husband," said she, and her large, beautiful eyes looked at him almost pleadingly. "I beg you, make no plans. She is still only a child."

"Were you, then, older when you became my wife, Minna?"

"No, Bernhard, but——"

"And have we not been happy together until now, and shall we not still be?"

She nodded, and took her handkerchief and pressed

Digitized by Google

it to her eyes. "I did not mean that," said she, while he took her hand and passed his arm around her; "but I would so gladly have her a little longer for myself, unshared with another, for who knows how long I——" She broke off, and tried to suppress the rising tears. "Stay!" begged she, as she noticed how his face changed, and a sad expression came over it. "I feel so strangely to-day; do not go!" She smiled up at him again. "See, Erving, I also will be glad when she has a loving husband; but he must be just as good and honorable as you——"

He looked tenderly in her eyes. "He must be the very best of men," confirmed he; "and you shall decide."

"And one who does not seem to possess all these characteristics, Erving?"

"We will give him the mitten, Minna."

"Yes, sir," laughed she; "but if she—if she loves him?"

"God will prevent her," replied he, "from being unhappy."

"Yes; may God prevent that!" repeated Mrs. Erving, and looked at the slender figure which walked along the garden path, with apron full of flowers. "Erving," said she, playfully, "I must look after your Selldorf, over there."

"Do so, Minna," replied he, and let her hand fall. "You will learn to know a brave character." And then he kissed her forehead pleasantly, and left her alone with her dreams. The misty work slipped from her lap; her thoughts wandered into a distant future, and gradually a gentle, happy smile settled about her mouth.

Digitized by Google

And now Whit-Sunday had arrived; before the front door of the mill stood two straight, bright green May trees, and, from the topmost twigs, red ribbons floated in the warm spring breeze. The pigeons all sat in a row on the roof, and cooed and plumed themselves; and Peter, who so proudly guided the spirited brown horses from his box, had just tied a red ribbon around the whip. At the side of the comfortable, open carriage were fastened fresh birch branches, and now the church bells rang out from the little village, and Minnie—Dorte must stay at home to-day and cook—walked past the carriage in her best Sunday clothes, with her hymn-book in her hand, and nodded sweetly to Peter. Now, the master of the house came out of the door, and assisted his wife into the carriage. And Lieschen and Auntie followed behind. The former looked prettier than ever in her filmy white gown, with the blue ribbons; and Auntie was resplendent in black silk; her cap was to-day ornamented with lace and blue ribbon, and in her hand she held her hymn-book, together with handkerchief and little bouquet; Lieschen, also, had a couple of rosebuds in her hand.

Dorte closed the carriage door, curtesying.

"Don't let the chickens burn," admonished Auntie.

"Oh, no!" replied the former, and, looking at the young girl, she added: "Pray for me, miss!"

Lieschen nodded. "Why, then, I?" asked she, smiling.

"Oh, because the good God is surely fond of you," said Dorte.

Mr. Erving laughed. "Well, Peter, go on," and so the carriage rolled away to the village, and its inmates had enough to do to return the many greetings which

Digitized by Google

were called to them from all sides. Before the pastor's house a whole shower of flowers flew into Lieschen's lap, and the little troop hid themselves, giggling, behind the fence, only to call out, when the carriage had passed: "Good morning, Aunt Lieschen, Aunt Lieschen!"

At the church door stood Mr. Selldorf; he blushed to the roots of his hair when he offered Lieschen his hand to dismount, and asked Mr. Erving's permission to sit in his pew. And so, during the sermon, he sat near her on the bench. Auntie was sitting with the parents —honor to whom honor is due! Mrs. Erving and the pastor's wife, who sat in the preacher's pew with her eldest children, slyly nodded to each other. And Mr. Otto Selldorf, as he looked around the church, in which a numerous congregation of devout ones had assembled, thought he perceived that all eyes were fixed on his charming neighbor. But she sat there, her head deeply lowered under her dainty straw hat; her little hands, folded in each other, rested in her lap, and her lips moved softly. Even during the sermon her eyes remained lowered, and it seemed to her neighbor once that a large, brilliant drop fell quite quickly on the white dress. But no; that was indeed not possible. What cause had a young, charming creature to weep on such a lovely Whit-Sunday?

And at length, when the pastor had pronounced the blessing, and the congregation joined in the concluding hymn, she raised her blue eyes, and they shone calmly and happily again.

As they drove home, Lieschen rejoiced at the sunshine, and the gay, animated life on the village street. Peter must stop at the large linden, and she got out.

Digitized by Google

"Greet Nelly for me, Lieschen," Auntie cried after her, and nodded pleasantly to her, and she walked with light steps along the shady path. Her heart truly began to beat a trifle loudly as she now turned into the linden alley. She would see Army again; but that could really be wholly indifferent to her. It was strange that such a suffocating, hot feeling rose in her heart; she took off her hat and walked more slowly. There was the massive portal already, and the two stone bears seemed to raise their paws particularly threateningly to-day. She stood still and pressed her hand to her beating heart; she would have preferred to turn back, but what would Nelly think, to whom she had formerly gone almost daily? She might believe she was afraid of the strange cousin. No; forward!

She walked rapidly toward the end of the alley, but stood still again in surprise; for not far from her, on the turf, in the shadow of an old, massive tree, which bordered the open place before the castle, before one of the sandstone benches stood a set table, and behind that sat Nelly's mother in an arm-chair, but so that her back was turned to the young girl. The old baroness had taken the place opposite her, and read a newspaper zealously. A number of cups and plates showed that they had evidently breakfasted this lovely morning in the open air. Lieschen did not venture to go further; a never-before-known shame took possession of her, and the thought of going up to the old baroness, who always treated her in an unfriendly manner, and of whom she thought with a certain shyness, since Auntie's insinuations, had something terrifying for her. So she stood, some five paces away, when the old lady accidentally raised her eyes, and discovering her,

Digitized by Google

started so violently that she knocked one of the delicate cups from the table, which fell with a crash upon the stone bench. Her face, which a moment before had been deathly pale, was immediately covered with a deep flush, and, before Lieschen could approach the table, she cried out to her:

"How unsuitable to startle us in this manner! How did you come here without one hearing your steps?"

"Oh, pray, mamma," said her daughter-in-law, and sat upright in her chair, as she now saw the young girl's slender figure near her; "Lieschen certainly did not wish to frighten you, and you were as sunk in your reading as I in my revery; so that we did not hear her coming. Good morning, Lieschen; how are you?"

She took the hand, which the girl permitted unresistingly, for she still stood drawn up to her full height, and looked at the old lady, whose dark eyes rested on her, sparkling with rage.

"I beg your pardon," said she then, softly; "I had been here some moments before I ventured to make myself noticed, for I feared to disturb you." It sounded calmly after the passionate words of the old baroness. "And," she continued, "I have only come for a few moments, to wish you a happy feast day, as I have done each year, and to see Nelly."

"Sit down, Lieschen," begged the younger baroness. "Nelly will be here at once; she has gone into the park for a little with Blanche and Army, and—there she is. I hear her speaking."

The old lady shrugged her shoulders impatiently as Lieschen quietly seated herself on the sandstone bench, and sympathetically inquired after the health of the pale woman, from whose cheeks the fleeting red, which

Digitized by Google

the scarcely polite words of her mother-in-law had painted there, had disappeared again.

Meanwhile the voices came nearer, and Lieschen could plainly distinguish the resonant, deep organ of her former playmate. Again that suffocating, hot feeling overcame her, and, for a moment, confused her calm thinking; but then her eyes rested with an expression of the greatest astonishment upon the place which lay before her, in the bright sunshine—for, at one side, by the empty stone basin of the fountain, stood Army, and spoke with a lady; yes, but was it a grown lady, or only a child, who sat there with such fairy-like daintiness on a horse? She hung in the saddle like a flower, and now she cried, in a soft voice, but with the accent of a spoiled child: "Let go of the reins, Army; let go. I wish to ride alone now for a little before Aunt!"

The young man stepped back, and the horse began to come towards them in slow, Spanish gait. At each movement which the animal made, the white, lace-edged dress flew like a misty cloud about the dainty form which sat there so securely on its back. The eyes in the pale face were lowered, but with golden light in the hot sunshine, over the white forehead, and waving down over her back, shone luxuriant, red, wonderful hair.

"Superb, Blanche!" cried Army, whose glance hung as if spell-bound on the charming apparition; "superb! Miss Elise in Renz does not ride better."

He walked along slowly at some distance from her, and stood close by the table. Just then the horse turned, and came directly toward the little group. The eyes of the old baroness sparkled with joy. She had once been a much-admired rider; and sport is indeed one of the noblest passions.

Digitized by Google

"*Merariglia*, my angel!" cried she, as the young lady now stopped, and, assisted by Army, slid lightly from the saddle. "You have the horse fabulously under your control; but, *mia cara*, how can you ride in the blazing

sun without a hat? I implore you—your wonderful complexion. In the country we must always——"

"Do not worry, aunt, I never burn." She sank carelessly into a hammock, which Army steadied for her, without noticing the young girl, who had risen the moment the rider dismounted.

"Army, pray speak to Lieschen," said his mother, somewhat admonishingly. "And you, dear Blanche, permit me to introduce to you Nelly's friend, Miss

Digitized by Google

Elizabeth Erving. But where is Nelly?" she asked, impatiently, while Blanche raised her eyelashes, and, with a slight nod of the head, but without changing her comfortable position, replied to the young girl's graceful bow. But the dark eyes remained fixed upon her for a moment in wonder; then she seized the ivory fan which hung at her side, unfolded it, and, behind this protection, drew down her little mouth in a yawn.

Army had bowed politely, and replied to his mother's question where Nelly was, that she was probably somewhere in the park. At the same moment Henry came and led the horse away. The old man looked so imposing in his new brown livery that Lieschen did not at first recognize him, and looked at him in surprise. The young lady in the hammock noticed this, for a somewhat mocking smile appeared for a moment on the full little mouth. She swung somewhat more violently, but suddenly she stopped.

"What do you do here all day long?" asked she, while again a yawn was hidden behind the fan.

"We will go to walk this afternoon," replied Army, quickly. "There are charming wood paths here."

"Go to walk?"

"We have, unfortunately, no carriage to place at your disposal," remarked the young baroness, simply.

The old lady smiled mockingly. "The remark was very superfluous, Cornelia."

"Do you not like to walk, Cousin Blanche?" asked Army, who had seated himself in the chair opposite his mother.

"No," declared she, without raising her eyes.

The young officer bit his lips.

"Could not we ask the bailiff for his carriage for a

Digitized by Google

couple of hours?" said he, then. "What do you think, grandmamma?"

"That it is quite a strange idea of yours, Army. You can scarcely persuade any one to get into this antediluvian vehicle."

"Oh, why not, mamma?" said the younger baroness. "I only fear that the carriage will not be available just to-day, for the family usually take a little drive themselves on Sunday."

"I refuse once for all," replied the old lady, repellantly.

"May I offer our carriage?" asked Lieschen. "Father would certainly take great pleasure——"

"There is an outlet," cried Army. "If you like, Blanche, we will accept. Eh, grandmamma?"

"No, thank you," replied the latter; but Blanche answered neither yes nor no; she directed a scrutinizing, astonished glance at the girl in the simple white dress over there—who was she?

"Well, decide, cousin," begged Army.

"Yes, decide," added the grandmother, while a hateful smile played about her mouth. "It is not Whit-Sunday every day; on the work days the proud horses will have no time, because they must draw the rag wagon."

"Father's carriage horses are no working horses," said Lieschen; her lips trembled. "They would have no time for that, either, because father intended them exclusively for mother, for whom walking is very hard."

"I will not drive to-day," declared Blanche, whom the word "rag" had caused to shudder. "Is there much society about here?" she then asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Army, pleasantly. "However, we

Digitized by Google

associate with no one; you know, without a carriage——"

"And in the near neighborhood there is not a single family with whom any one could associate—in a proper manner," completed the old baroness.

"Ah!" said the young lady, and leaned wearily back in her hammock, while she pushed her long golden, shining hair forward, and began to wind several strands round her fingers.

Army had grown crimson, and glanced quickly over at Lieschen, who had suddenly risen. Her lovely face was deathly pale, and tears sparkled in her large eyes.

"I must say farewell, without having spoken to Nelly."

"She will be sorry, Lieschen," said the suffering woman near her, and gave her her hand. "Perhaps you will meet her in the park. Greet your parents and Auntie for me."

"Thank you, madam," replied the young girl, and turned to go, after a bow to the others. The old lady's dark eyes followed her slender form with an indescribable expression.

"Thank heaven!" cried she, drawing a deep breath. "I do not know what it is, but the presence of this girl puts me out of temper every time, and always excites me to little malicious acts; she has such a horrible way of knocking on her money bags. What arrogance to offer her equipage! And you, Army, were within an ace of accepting it! To show yourself in the rag-miller's carriage, which every child knows—incomprehensible in you!"

"I only wished to fulfil Blanche's wish," replied he; "however, you are right, grandmamma. I will seek to

Digitized by Google

make it possible in another way." The young lady continued silent, and swung perpetually.

"I think Lieschen was visibly hurt to-day. One surely should refuse a politeness more pleasantly. She only wished to be obliging."

"Cornelia, I beg of you!" the old lady interrupted her daughter-in-law irritably. "It is always the same refrain with you; as if such people were as delicately sensitive as we. You naturally will continue to associate with them intimately. I do not understand how it is possible. I felt suffocated the first day in this plebeian atmosphere!"

At this moment Nelly came quickly from the alley; her blonde curls flew around a heated face. The neat, but more than simple, cotton dress left her feet free, which were in small, but not too dainty leather boots, and her black silk apron one saw had been very carefully kept; but still it was a long time since it was new. "What has happened to Liesel?" she asked, breathlessly, as she came nearer. "She was crying."

"Before everything, Nelly, I should like to ask where you have been, and tell you that it is very unsuitable for a young lady to run so. Is that the dress which you intend to keep on to-day?"

"Grandmamma!" cried she, and laughed gayly. "How droll you are! As if ever I possessed another costume than this cotton gown! I cannot possibly wear my black dress on this lovely day."

Blanche turned her head, and one of those cold glances wandered over the despised cotton dress. Her maid would not have thanked her for this frock. But Army suddenly blushed deeply; he now remembered a little note in which a gold piece was wrapped, the

Digitized by Google

birthday-gift of his sister. Where had the note been kept?

"Why was Lieschen crying?" repeated the young girl, impatiently. "She would not tell me."

No one answered her. "Army, please tell me!" she begged, and her eyes filled with tears.

"The child seems to be very sensitive," the grandmother explained, in his place. "I said something quite in general, and that highly offended her sense of rank, but it is always so with these people. They place themselves on the same step with us, and cannot bear it when one makes them feel the wrong of such undertaking."

Nelly was silent. She had heard enough from the tone in which grandmother had spoken the two words, "these people," to understand. But why was the old lady always so excited when she saw Lieschen?

"It is too warm for me here," she continued; "and I prefer to seek my cool room. Visits are welcome to me at any moment," said she, rising, and smiled pleasantly at the young lady in the hammock. The dark eyes could shine so seductively and charmingly.

"I will accompany you, mamma," said her daughter-in-law, rising. "Nelly, will you stay here now?"

The young girl sat down beside her cousin. She secretly glanced at her neighbor; she had imagined her so different, had looked forward to girlish chats, to the continual presence of a young girl of her age; and then, yesterday, an elegant, frail, delicate lady had gotten out of the extra post; her dark eyes had wandered scrutinizingly and coldly over her surroundings and the people, and had not once exclaimed when she entered her room, whose furnishings Army had ordered and

Digitized by Google

arranged, and which, in Nelly's opinion, were so surprisingly beautiful, in the abundance of pale green silken stuff which, like waves of the sea, covered furniture and windows. They had not exchanged a hearty word. Blanche spoke more with her eyes, and these dark stars spoke a plain, very expressive language, and every glance seemed to say: "How boundlessly tiresome it is here!"

At the first moment Blanche's looks had caused her great joy. "Agnes Mechthilde!" she had cried, and her grandmother and mother also had gazed in astonishment at the delicate form, with the loosened red blonde hair. The former had secretly rejoiced, for that the "little red-haired Blanche, the scrofulous child, would become such a piquant beauty, she had never believed," she assured Nelly. "A piquant beauty!" Nelly scarcely knew what the adjective meant; but that she was beautiful—her cousin—she felt also; for example, now, when the long lashes were lowered over the cold eyes, the oval, pale face under the high-arched brows, whose blackness contrasted so strangely with the bright-colored hair, surmounted by the golden mass of this wonderful veil, offered an indescribably charming picture. She really was just so—the ancestor upstairs—just so was the slender neck, set on the delicate shoulders; just the same carriage of the little head; a few short curls, according to the fashion, fell over the alabaster, white forehead, and about the little mouth lay a thoughtful smile. She played with her ivory fan, and passed its smooth surface caressingly over her face.

Army stood there by the trunk of the great linden, and looked thoughtfully down at her. Here she was

Digitized by Google

in the house of his fathers. With what a happy, beating heart he had awaited her, and now it seemed to him that she had only come unwillingly; as if, like a captive bird, she would fain fly again from this solitude into gay, happy life. She preserved such a cool, reserved bearing for all the attentions with which she was overwhelmed. Even her charmingly arranged rooms, which had cost him so much thought and pains, she had scarcely given a glance—not to mention the other heavy sacrifices.

Heavens! Still it was incomprehensibly foolish. The cost amounted to more than his income for two years. But, bah! If he once held that childishly small hand in his, then this whole affair was a mere trifle. This grandmamma had told his mother impressively, who had glanced apprehensively at the upholsterer, and the new livery for Henry, and the servant who came with Blanche's saddle horse, who now stood at the long-deserted marble manger. Had not a regular cook been engaged for this time, and now flitted about the large castle kitchen—and all this for the little fairy who sat there so unsympathizingly!

Army sighed and glanced over at the imposing building, which lay there in the dazzling noonday sun; the glowing light trembled on the high, pointed slate roof; and there, in Blanche's room, the pretty maid just then leaned out and closed the windows.

Nelly remarked this to her cousin, who still sat there, dreaming, and swinging slightly.

"How foolish!" cried she, and sprang up. "She knows that I love warmth; and, besides, this horrible, damp air in the old, lofty rooms! Pray, Nelly, tell her she must leave the windows open."

Digitized by Google

The child fairly ran to the castle, she was happy to come away from the oppressive tediousness for the time.

"Which are my rooms, Army? One cannot make out in this confusion of windows," asked Blanche.

"There, cousin," he explained, and came nearer to her; "there in the second story—your dressing-room adjoins the tower."

"Ah, then, that is the door which is artfully concealed by that green stuff. I could not determine whether behind the tightly nailed folds an old cupboard or a door was concealed. Besides," she continued, "why did they not give me the little tower room? It must be charming, with its round windows; and I could have had a view out over the country." She had spoken quickly, and now looked up at her cousin with a lighting up of her dark eyes.

"I am truly sorry, Blanche," he said. "I had the same idea; but grandmamma seemed to have particular reasons——"

"So? Is it perhaps haunted?" she interrupted him, animatedly.

Army laughed. "Alas, not, cousin; at least, I know nothing of it. It must be the young Mr. Streitwitz who haunts it, and who once shot himself on account of your charming likeness, as the chronicle reports."

She did not hear the last words. "Army, please get me the tower room!" Her voice had the sweet tone of a pleading child.

"I will do all that I can, Blanche. I will go once more to grandmamma and ask her, although she refused me abruptly."

"But soon, Army—soon!" she cried, and smiled at him.

Digitized by Google

He looked at her wholly delighted. "Certainly; at once," stammered he, for she had never looked at him so radiantly since she had been here. "Blanche," he added, "I am afraid you will be wholly bored here." The smile disappeared from her face.

"Oh, please do not finish," cried she; "rather tell

me a story, cousin, until I must go upstairs and dress. For whom does one dress here?" she added, and shrugged her delicate shoulders. "Tell me," she said

Digitized by Google

again, and went on swinging, "who is the young girl to whom your grandmother was—do not be vexed with me—boundlessly impolite?"

"Miss Lieschen Erving."

"I know that; but who is her father? She spoke of her carriage——"

"Her father is the wealthiest man in the region, Blanche; owner of a paper factory—from that comes the 'rag' malice of grandmamma—owner of extensive forests, in which we will have opportunity to walk, as they border on our park."

"And why does not grand-aunt like the girl?"

"Yes, Blanche. What does grandmamma care about a *why?* She has always cherished an inexplicable aversion for the young girl. Besides, it vexes her that Nelly associates so intimately with her. She holds strictly to rank prejudices now, and is not wrong in that."

Blanche shook her head. "Do you know, cousin, the old air seems to blow here which is more and more disappearing in the outer world. A—a letter!" she interrupted herself, and hastily took the dainty square envelope from the salver which old Henry held out to her, and then he disappeared with as light steps as he had come. "From Leonie," said she, half aloud, while she tore open the letter. A deep blush for a moment rose to her face, which instantly became pale again—as pale as the gown she wore; the paper shook in the little trembling hands; then she laughed aloud, piercingly, peculiarly, so that the young officer was startled. "That is laughable," said she, and crumpled the letter together. "Here is a proof of what I just told you, Army: the world no longer has such exclusive views as

Digitized by Google

your lady grandmother. Leonie von Hammerstein just writes me that Count Seebach is engaged to a Miss So-and-so, the daughter of a head forester, and this from violent passion—from love, as Leonie expresses it. Do you hear, Army?—from love!" She laughed, and with that a wild fire shone in the dark eyes, and the little hands tore the paper into a thousand pieces.

"What? Count Seebach, with whom you danced so often last winter?" asked Army; "the one who fairly overwhelmed you with flowers?" He spoke quickly, and rested his eyes penetratingly on the excited features of his cousin.

"Did he dance with me? I scarcely remember," replied she flippantly, and looked at the luxuriant green leafy sea of flowers and foliage; but in her voice was a forced, deeply excited sound, and her delicate nostrils twitched nervously. "Yes, the world progresses. That such a proud man as Seebach, a man who a short time ago spoke of his spotlessly preserved family tree—that this one from love—ha, ha, Army, it is laughable, is it not?—from love should make a common girl his wife!" She shook her head violently, and again the unnatural, forced laugh came from her lips. Then she suddenly rose; her dainty ivory fan, on its silver chain, struck against the massive table, she turned round so quickly. "I am fearfully tired," she added, and laid her small hand over her eyes, as if the bright sunlight blinded her. "I am not accustomed to remain so long in the open air, and must rest a little, so that I shall be fresh again for dinner. *Addio*, cousin!"

She nodded to him, while she refused his company by a gesture, and walked across the open place. It

Digitized by Google

seemed as if the slight form was borne along by hidden wings, as if at any moment the golden veil which floated out from the little head would spread itself out and carry her upwards, so light, so charming, was the whole picture. At the door of the tower she turned round again, and Army heard a clear silvery laugh. How differently that sounded from the excited, forced laugh which he had just heard! She was a riddle, this girl. When would he have the right to solve this riddle?

At dinner the young lady appeared in a dazzling toilet. The pale-green silken stuff shone delicately through the white mull of the overdress; the wonderful hair was fastened at the back of her head with an ivory comb, and a broad dull gold bracelet, in which sparkled a magnificent emerald, encircled one slender wrist. Her face showed no trace of that apathetic quietness which had made it seem so cold and bored this morning. Blanche had a charming smile for every one, and the old baroness glanced tenderly from one to the other of the young pair who sat opposite her. The cool dining-room had not for a long time heard such a happy clicking of glasses, and Henry for an equally long time had not opened any of those carefully guarded silver-necked bottles whose contents the old baroness was so proud of.

To-day he poured out again the sparkling wine in the pointed glasses, and carried out with suitable dignity the different courses, and let his clever eyes wander over the little table company, and over the beautiful girl at his young master's side, of whom the strange maid had told him that she really and truly would be immensely rich some day, and that she had

Digitized by Google

as many lovers as fingers on her hands. But old Sanna beamed with joy, for her mistress had repeatedly given her to understand what it all meant; and she now saw brilliant days in store for her baroness again. The young lady with the golden, shining head was to be the fairy who was to rescue the old castle from its solitude and awaken it to that luxurious, delightful life which had once ruled within its walls. Her silvery laughter sounded so promising for happiness in the lofty rooms, and she talked so childishly with the old baroness, and begged to be allowed to call her grandmamma. She could charm a smile to the lips of the pale, quiet woman, and the heart of the young officer at her side beat violently when she looked at him so radiantly, or her sweet breath touched him.

But Nelly—little Nelly—what was the matter with her? She, who formerly so willingly obeyed her brother, thought he was right in everything that he said and did, was ready to read the slightest wish in his eyes, to-day was so indifferent to her cousin, seemed to have so little sympathy for all that took place around her, that it almost amounted to rudeness. Her red mouth, which so willingly opened for a hearty laugh, to-day remained severely closed, and her eyes only at times shyly glanced at the happy face of her brother, who was so unwearied in his attentions to his neighbor. Before her eyes appeared, again and again, a pale face, with a couple of great tears in her blue eyes. What had they done to Lieschen—her Lieschen? No; she must just go to her, and she should tell her who had insulted her.

It had become perfectly dark when Nelly, several hours after, came out of Lieschen's room, where she

Digitized by Google

had talked in the twilight to her friend, and had in vain tried to learn why she had cried.

"It is nothing, Nelly," Lieschen assured her again and again, with her soft voice. "It was very childish in me to be vexed at something which is really not worth speaking about. And now, come; I will accompany you."

And so they crossed the mill bridge and walked along the old well-known path, in the shadow of the old trees. It was a warm evening; not a breath of air was stirring, and along the distant horizon lay a dark mass of clouds; a pale lightning flashed from time to time, and threw a dull light on the surroundings. The nightingale sang loudly in all the bushes, and in the distance was heard the song of the young peasants, who were rejoicing with all their heart in their festive mood.

"I do not know what is the matter with me," began Lieschen, and drew a deep breath. "I feel as if I were suffocating! How heavy and close the air is! I think Auntie is right—we will have a thunder-storm."

Nelly nodded.

"My mother also complains that she can scarcely breathe," continued Lieschen. "Do you know, Nelly, Whitsunday has never before been so sad for me as this time, and yet all was as formerly. If only something serious does not happen in case the storm comes!"

So they had come as far as the park gate. Mechanically they turned into the linden alley; the perfume of the elders was almost overpowering, and Lieschen clutched her aching temples with her little hands. All at once she felt a slight pressure on her arm, and Nelly stood still.

Digitized by Google

"Lieschen," said she, "was not that Blanche's voice?"

For a while all was quiet and peaceful; then light

steps came toward them. The rustle of a dress accompanied them; and now through the stillness rang out a sweet, clear voice:

Digitized by Google

"Army—my dear, dear Army!"

How enchanting that sounded! The young girl there felt as if a sharp knife were plunged in her breast; involuntarily she pressed her hand to her heart. And now a whisper—that was his voice; how good that she could not hear what he said! Ah, if she only had not come!

And the rustle of the dress and the slow steps came nearer. She dropped her friend's hand and fled behind the thick trunk of a linden, and yet she bent forward in breathless interest to listen; and then—then a bright flash of lightning illuminated the heavens, and showed her a slender girlish form, and in his arms; there she hung, as daintily and lightly as a fairy, the beautiful cousin with the red-gold hair. She had bent her head back, and he stooped down to her and kissed her. It was only a moment, but it sufficed to betray it all to the two startled blue eyes. She laid her head against the trunk of the old tree and closed her eyes in fierce, never before known pain. But Nelly cried out shrilly: "Army! Army!" How pitiful, how warning, it sounded. And then he answered. His voice sounded so joyful. "Little sister, where are you? Come; see what I have found! Come here—you shall run ahead and tell grandmamma that fortune has now really returned—that Blanche is mine!" And then there was another vivid flash through the trees, and it shone on a girl's form fleeing homeward through the alley.

Before the betrothed couple stood little Nelly, and looked up at her brother with great shy eyes; and when the flash faded a hot sob came from her breast, and with bowed head she walked to the castle to tell her mother that Blanche and Army—her dear, good Army—were betrothed.

Digitized by Google

But Auntie sat on the sandstone bench before the door and waited for her darling. The master and his wife were walking up and down in the garden, and Mr.

Selldorf accompanied them, and told them of his home and his brothers and sisters.

The old woman was absorbed in her thoughts, and each time that the lightning flashed through the sultry air she thought—if only Liesel were home! "Oh, alas! it will rain to-morrow," she whispered to herself, "then the pastor's picnic will come to nothing. Well, they must stop and amuse themselves here. There will be a kribbel-krabbel in the old mill, to be sure. How many will I have at table? There are eight from the parsonage alone, and then the two head foresters, and—merci-

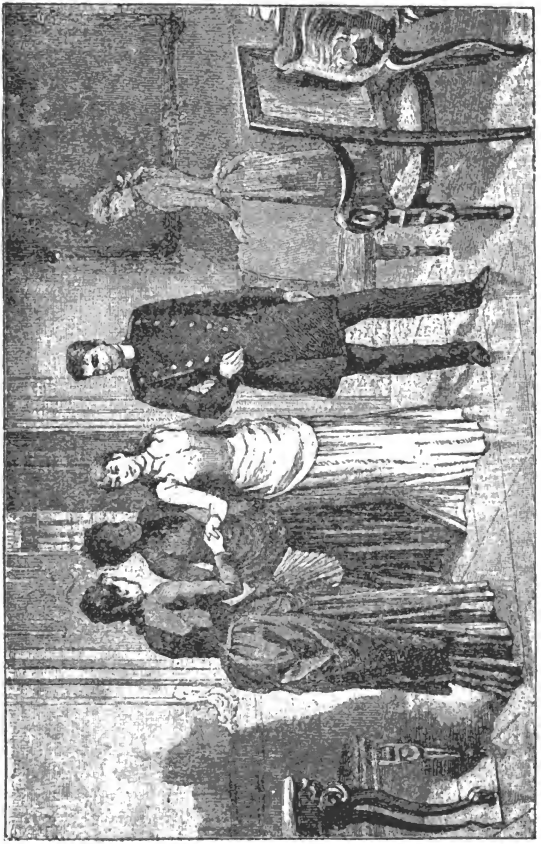
Digitized by Google

ful Heaven!" she screamed out. "Liesel, how you frightened me!" and she bent down to the young girl, who had sunk down at her feet as if lifeless and buried her head in her apron.

"What is the matter, my child? Liesel, pray speak! What is the matter?" she asked, and stroked her little head. "My God!" she continued, "are you ill, then, my heart's blossom?" But she received no answer. Only the girl raised her head, two arms were thrown round her neck, and hot, trembling lips were pressed tenderly to hers; then she disappeared, and the old woman heard the light steps on the stairs, and soon after, how the room door was locked.

"Strange child!" murmured she, and shook her head. She could not see how her darling walked restlessly up and down, and how at last the weary head lay on a tear-drenched pillow, and the little hands were clasped so tightly to say a prayer for Army, with whom she had once played as a little girl, and with whom she had now nothing to do in the world—ah, nothing, nothing more!

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

IX.

Up in the castle, quietness did not return for a long time. The young betrothed, to be sure, soon retired to her room. She was still so confused, as she said; it had all come about so suddenly, so surprisingly. She, to be sure, tolerated the flatteries which the old baroness said to her with radiant, joyful, surprised face, and listened to the moving words which Army's mother whispered to her. But then she was weary, and the lofty door of her room was hastily locked behind her; the sweet, childish smile disappeared from the beautiful face, and Sophie, the maid, had a very ungracious mistress. At length she sat in her night-dress at her writing-table, and the pen flew over the paper as if chased, and her mouth twitched as if in deepest vexation.

But down in the sitting-room his mother's arms were clasped around Army, and her eyes rested on his, which shone so happily. "My dear, good fellow," she whispered, "may you be happy! It has come so quickly, Army, and you are still so young. May God give you his blessing!" The old baroness, who walked briskly here and there in the room, now remained standing before the group, just as the young man pressed his lips to his mother's. "Army," she began, apparently vexed at the sentimental scene, "you know what you have to do next. You must go

Digitized by Google

to your aunt and formally ask for Blanche's hand, and then I hope that everything else will soon be arranged. You need only write to Blanche's father. I think we need come in no further contact with the man; in any case——"

"Certainly, grandmamma, I will go," he interrupted

her, gently. He had gone up to Nelly, who, crouching in a large arm-chair, had hidden her face in both hands.

"Little one," said he, softly, "have you no pleasant word for me?"

Digitized by Google

"Ah, Army," sobbed she, "I—I—was so frightened when I saw you there with cousin; and I am so sad that——"

"Why, Nelly! It is a great happiness for us all that it has come about so; and I love her so, my Blanche!"

"Does she love you also?" asked the young girl earnestly, and seized his hands. "Do you know that surely?"

"But, my heart," said he, laughing, "do you think she would otherwise marry me? She who is so beautiful and so courted?"

Nelly shook her head and looked past her brother with her tearful eyes. "But I imagined it so wholly different," she whispered.

"Foolish little thing!" said he, and tenderly stroked her curls.

"Pray, Army," the grandmother interrupted him, "do not waste so many words on the obstinate little thing. I hope that she will at least be more agreeable to her future sister-in-law. You were unbearably rude to-day, Nelly."

"I am not rude, only sad," the young girl defended herself.

"But that is ridiculous," continued the old lady. "You have no suspicion of what great good fortune has come to us to-day, or else you would wear a different expression. I really believe you are envious, Nelly."

"Oh, far from it," said the mother, kindly, in her gentle voice. "Every sister feels thus when her brother is betrothed. His whole love now belongs to his bride, but it is nevertheless very lovely when one knows him so truly happy, is it not, Nelly?"

She nodded amid her tears, and then quickly left the

Digitized by Google

room. Without, the first thunder of the advancing storm rolled through the sultry night.

"I think Nelly is ill," said the mother, anxiously; "her hands are so burning hot."

"Oh, nonsense; she is naughty. She pouts because, in her opinion, too much happened to her Liescher to-day," declared the old lady, angrily. "I wager she has already been down there in the mill, and has begged the simple thing's pardon. It is unheard of, really!"

"Certainly she was down there; she seemed to have just come from there when she met us so unexpectedly in the linden alley; besides, grandmamma, I must confess, and Blanche thinks so, too, you were too rough to the child."

At this moment there was a blinding flash, which was followed by a fearful thunder-clap.

"Misericordia, what a storm!" cried the old baroness, trembling, and for a moment forgot her sharp answer in the fear, "Is Blanche frightened?" Then the door flew open, and the young lady, in a white cashmere robe, suddenly stood in the middle of the room; she held her little hands over her ears, and looked around with terrified gaze. "I am afraid," said she, trembling, and fled to the large arm-chair which Nelly had just left.

Army hurried to her; he looked in her pale face, and seized her cold little hand.

"I would not like to live here always—not for the world!" she continued, and defiantly planted her dainty foot on the floor.

"Where will you live, then, my child?" asked the old baroness, listening in astonishment.

"Live, then?" repeated the young girl, in astonish-

Digitized by Google

ment, and her fear seemed momentarily to be wholly forgotten. "Yes, dear grandmamma, do you perchance imagine that Army and I would bury ourselves here? No; Heaven forbid! Eh, Army? We will travel, first, and see the world. I know none of the great watering-places yet—Ems, Baden-Baden, then Switzerland, Italy —only think! Italy, of which you told me so much yesterday. And then when we have seen all this, then we will seek a place that pleases us." She was suddenly silent, for again thunder had followed the lightning, and seemed to shake the old castle to its foundations. Army held his betrothed's hand; he stood near her, drawn up to his full height, and listened to the reverberating thunder; but the old lady, with an expression of the highest astonishment, stepped up to the pair, while the daughter-in-law sat up in her arm-chair and anxiously listened to what the little red mouth uttered so self-confidently.

"We must live where Aunt Stontheim decides, Blanche," said the young man now, calmly.

"No, never!" replied she, animatedly. "I will not be buried here in this old castle. I am still young; I will not be fettered, and will enjoy life. Army, you will grant that I am right. Live here! Once for all, never! Aunt is too sensible; she will not desire it, either—no, surely not," she added, with conviction.

"Certainly, Blanche, we will travel," he assured her. "But aunt has to choose our settled dwelling-place."

"And if she chooses Derenberg, then—I will not come with you. No, certainly I will not come with you. It is too sad here; I would die in this solitude."

"And would you, then, leave me here alone?" asked Army softly, and bent down to her to look in her eyes.

Digitized by Google

He said it jestingly, but something like fear sounded in his voice. "And yet you just told me, out under the trees, that you would only be happy where——"

His voice sank to a whisper.

A violent shake of the glistening, golden head was the answer. "No, no," cried she, "it was not meant so, Army. I will not have my little bit of liberty taken from me; it would be my death if I must daily walk through these lofty corridors and look out into the gloomy park."

"But if your future husband wished you to remain here?" asked the old lady, quite breathlessly; her delicate hands clutched convulsively the folds of her gown.

"He will not wish it," cried Blanche passionately, and sprang up. Her lovely little face had taken on an almost threatening expression, and her little feet trod the old parquet energetically: there was no longer a trace of that sweet yielding in her manner with which to-day, under the dark trees, she had clung to his arm. Obstinacy in its most hateful form was suddenly displayed, and her voice sounded sharp and rough. "It is laughable, fairly laughable," she continued, "to represent the wife as a slave, and say to her: 'Here where your husband is happy, you necessarily must be also; and if you are not, it is your affair—see how you can arrange it.' Army can and will not put it thus to me. I gave him my promise to belong to him, but now it lies in his hand to make me happy with him, and here I can and will not be."

"Blanche!" cried he, and his large eyes rested quite frightened on the young creature who had just, with a thousand sweet words of love, become his betrothed. "Blanche, I beg you, cease! You are excited to-day.

Digitized by Google

You are frightened." He rang the bell, and led her back to the arm-chair. "A glass of water," he said to Henry, who just then entered.

But the grandmother, as if petrified, gazed at her grandson's betrothed. What! This childish brain with one breath overthrow all her precious plans? She should live here as before in this solitude? The brilliant wealth should not be for her good? She should not be permitted to sun herself in the rays which a fresh, happy life spread here? Almost uncomprehending, she sank into a chair and gloomily watched the tall form of the young officer, who just then took the glass of water from the hands of the servant to hand it to his betrothed. Without, the rain now fell in torrents, and there was still a pale flash of lightning now and then, but the rumble of the thunder already echoed from a distance.

Suddenly a faint cry was heard from the adjoining room. "Nelly!" cried the younger baroness, startled, and hurried out. She went up to the sofa, on which lay a light form. A soft groan met her ear. "Child, are you ill?" cried she, filled with anxiety, and bent down to her and laid her hand on her hot forehead.

"Oh, she is terrible, mamma — she is terrible!" sobbed the girl. "My Army; my dear, good Army! She does not love him, mamma, you may believe me."

"Do not worry yourself, dear heart," her mother consoled her gently; "she is only a little capricious. All will be right yet."

"No, no, mamma! Ah, as I saw her, I thought of the old chronicle, and the verse about the red hair; it will not go out of my mind; and she is full of malice,

Digitized by Google

too. Ah, if she would only go away this evening, and never come again!"

With a thousand caressing words, to soothe the excited girl, her own heart was so disquieted. Could the young girl, then, really love the man to whom she had just engaged herself. The maidenly, sweet shyness with which she had come in with him before had so wholly disappeared, the charm of that hour must be obliterated from her mind—of that hour which is the loveliest in the life of a girl, and whose recollection, even in later years, brings a gentle smile to the lips of an old woman when she thinks of the time that she laid her hand in that of the beloved man for the first time. Could she, then, love him? The pale woman lowered her head, and great tears came to her eyes. She had been so unhappy in life, might her children fare better!

And at length Nelly fell asleep under her mother's caresses. It was an uneasy, feverish sleep, but the anxious mother left her little daughter alone; she had another child, her Army. She peeped cautiously in at the door. The old lady and the beautiful betrothed had disappeared; but there, in the deep window niche, he still stood—her darling—and gazed out into the dark night. She went up to him and laid her hand on his shoulder. "Army," said she, softly. He turned and looked at her questioningly. She did not say another word, but her eyes rested anxiously on the proud, handsome face as he drew her hand to his mouth.

"Do not worry yourself, mamma," said he hastily, and his voice did not sound as steady as usual; "she is a spoiled child, a very spoiled child, but she loves me—certainly I know it—and she will change. See, she was already sorry that she was so violent."

Digitized by Google

The mother suppressed her rising tears, and stroked his forehead lightly. She saw that the young man was wounded to the inmost heart, and that pained her so indescribably. The short time of her unhappy mar riage came back to her memory with full force. "Good night, Army," she whispered, and turned quickly away.

"Good night, mamma," said he, and kissed her caressingly. "Do not worry about me."

Full two weeks had elapsed since that Whitsun night. Storm and rain at that time had stripped all the abundant blossoms from trees and bushes, and strewed them like fresh snow on the ground; but now the roses in the miller's garden burst into full splendor, and the lindens of the old alley in the castle park were in fullest bloom. Very often in these last days had Lieschen walked along this path which she had not thought to tread so soon again. Nelly had been very ill, and old Henry, at her desire, must bring her friend to the sicked. She had willingly come, and had sat with her for nours in the dim, lofty room and held the little feverish hand in hers.

Meanwhile Army had been with Aunt Stontheim, and nad asked her consent, and a very affectionate letter had come from Blanche's father, who gave his blessing to the betrothed. Army had given her a charming little carriage; his saddle-horse drew it very well—to be sure, he was a little gay, but she was a soldier's child, and was not afraid. She was so loving now, the little betrothed—so very submissive and girlish; she had herself declared that she was sorry to have been so violent on the evening of her betrothal, but a storm excited her nerves so. And Army—well, he was the

Digitized by Google

happiest man one could find; at least, so thought Lieschen. He sometimes entered the dark sick-room to greet his sister, and then his face always shone so with happiness and pride when he stooped down to her and brought her a greeting from his betrothed.

The latter had only once appeared at her cousin's sick-bed, but the dainty figure with the long, rustling train and the shining golden hair had violently excited the patient when she hastily asked how she was, and whether she could soon get up, so that the young girl burst into tears when she had gone again. "If she only will not come back soon," she had said. "I feel so oppressed near her, and the perfume that she always uses makes my head ache." But Lieschen was not noticed at all, although Blanche saw the tall, slender figure standing beside the bed; the grandmother also never came in the sick-room as long as she knew Lieschen was there, and Sanna murmured something about obstinacy, and that she could take as good care of her as the simple thing from the mill, "that was something of the young baroness."

The message which called Lieschen to the castle came just when the "kribbel-krabbel" of which Auntie had spoken the evening before was in full swing. The young girl was standing among the troop of the pastor's children, and giving them the customary chocolate; and in the sitting-room the news which had already gone through the whole village was being discussed—that the young baron was engaged to his beautiful, wealthy cousin.

"I am heartily glad," her father's deep voice had said. "They need such a little bit of sunshine up there." And the pastor had expressed the wish that Army

Digitized by Google

had made a happy choice, while the women surmised how it would be now up at the castle. But Lieschen had suddenly set down again the plate of cake which she wished to divide, her face had grown pale, and she scarcely heard the rejoicing of the children. All her thoughts had gone back again to the picture which had appeared before her yesterday evening amid the flashing lightning; yes, she must control herself, in order not to weep, and then she went into the kitchen to Auntie, and silently sat down near her.

The old woman now knew why her darling was so pale; she was inwardly happy that it had come about so, for now her heart's darling could overcome it, even from pride—for "Love is badly placed which wins no love in return, and must die," she calculated, and "Love without love in return is a question without an answer, and has no continuance." She saw, indeed, that the little mouth no longer smiled, and that the eyes looked so serious; but time would heal that. With the betrothal at the castle a great stone had fallen from her heart, and she stroked the girl's cheeks tenderly.

And just then Henry had appeared with the disquieting news, and Lieschen had only delayed a moment to ask leave, which was immediately granted her, however unwilling the happy circle were to do without her. "Aunt Lieschen, come back soon;" "Good-bye, Aunt Lieschen!" the fresh children's voices had cried after her, while they flattened their little noses against the window pane. Behind the curtains a young man with curly light hair and two honest, bright eyes had followed the young figure, which under the umbrella disappeared then into the forest path, and a disappointed

Digitized by Google

expression settled about his mouth. What had become of this so longingly awaited Whitsun Monday? Instead of a picnic, rain; instead of ardent glances into blue

eyes, the teasing of these wild children, who had already advanced Selldorf to uncle.

And now the sickness had been conquered; the dark curtains of the sick-room were drawn back, the windows opened, and the young girl lay on the sofa and

Digitized by Google

inhaled with pleasure the pure woods' air which blew into the room so caressingly; and she rested her eyes thankfully on Lieschen, who sat near her and talked to her. No one else was with them, for a guest had come —Blanche's father, as Nelly reported in a whisper— who was talking with grandmother and Army in Aunt Stontheim's commission. "I am truly happy, Lieschen," she added, "that I need not be there, for the moment that the letter announcing uncle arrived, grandmamma looked so very angry. But tell me, Lieschen; you look so pale?" she then asked. "You have certainly overtaxed yourself taking care of me."

The young girl denied this, blushing. From without now sounded voices and horses' hoofs. "Ah! they are returning from their drive," said Nelly. "Come, Lieschen, we must see it." She rose somewhat languidly and went to the window. Down there before the house, as it seemed, the whole family was assembled. Blanche still sat on her horse, in her black riding habit, her bold little hat with the long black feather on her abundant hair, which was to-day fastened up at the back of her head in a heavy puff, instead of falling down over her back, as usual. The horse was restive, but she sat perfectly secure in her saddle, and with her little gloved hand patted the beautiful animal's neck caressingly. Army had already sprung from his bay horse; he stood beside his betrothed to assist her to dismount, and looked over at his future father-in-law, who was approaching slowly between the two baronesses. He was a little corpulent man, as Lieschen could observe, and seemed to be stating an opinion very zealously, for he gesticulated violently as he spoke.

Digitized by Google

Nelly's mother glanced up at the window at which the two young girls stood; she nodded pleasantly, and the eyes of her two companions followed this greeting. The elder lady looked away again, indifferently, while the colonel, remaining standing, took off his hat and

smiled up at them; then they heard him ask who Lieschen was, but what was answered she could not understand.

Meanwhile, Blanche had dismounted, and Lieschen

Digitized by Google

led her friend back to the sofa again. Soon after a loud conversation announced the entrance of the party into the adjoining room. Lieschen took up her book again and wished to begin the interrupted reading, when the chairs were pushed back in the other room, and suddenly the voice of the old gentleman was plainly to be heard by them through the tall folding doors.

"I am sorry, madame, that the affair seems to be so little to your taste; however——"

"It seems, therefore, so much the more to yours, colonel," the sharp voice of the old baroness interrupted him.

"Pardon. I come only as the ambassador of Countess Stontheim, and have before remarked emphatically that I will not mix at all in the arrangement of the matter. Nevertheless, I will not deny that it seems most sensible to me." His voice betrayed a certain irritation.

"Matter of opinion, dearest Derenberg!"

"Certainly; but you yourself must admit that Army is yet too young, too inexperienced, to get himself out of the muddle—pardon me, baroness—in which, alas, all the Derenberg affairs are involved. It requires a very, very experienced manager to bring up again the depreciated estate, granted that one can win it back again. The forest, for instance—Countess Stontheim spoke to the lawyer Hellwig about this matter—the forest is as good as lost. The present owner—what is his name?—you must know, a manufacturer here in the neighborhood—will not retire for any consideration. So the forest is lost forever, and what is such an estate without forests?"

Digitized by Google

"Erving not sell the wood again?" cried the old lady; "ha, ha! then you do not know him! With such people, it only depends how much one offers them; for a not too great profit such tradespeople will sell their souls. No, no, my good colonel, that is a ridiculous idea which I would not have believed of you. I wager anything, offer him so-and-so much more and the forest is your——"

"You would lose the wager, madame, for Hellwig in Madame von Stontheim's commission inquired in a roundabout manner and received a decided refusal; besides——" The old lady's loud laugh interrupted him.

"It is possible that you are right, Derenberg," said she, "for this *parvenu,* like all his kind, hates the nobility, and us in particular. *Plebaglio!*" added she, scornfully, in her mother tongue.

"Besides," repeated the colonel, with perceptibly raised voice, and—"Pardon, baroness," he continued, politely, as she was silent—"I am not at all interested to know on what terms you have placed yourself with this man; that alters the case in nowise. I only wished to add that in regard to the estate itself and the farms, matters are in a perfect chaos. It is enough to make one's hair stand on end, madame—Jews, money-lenders, rights of sale, first, second, and third mortgages, what all—— In short, the Countess Stontheim prefers not to touch the matter, as an arrangement could only be made by an enormous sacrifice. She wishes, as I have already had the honor to communicate to you early this morning, that Army, after his wedding—which is fixed for the autumn—should remain in the service. She will provide the young couple with abundant

Digitized by Google

means, and later, if Army should have an inclination to become a landed proprietor, she intends to buy him an estate whose affairs are in a *settled* condition. Castle Derenberg will always be a fine summer home for the young couple, and the house of his fathers is preserved for Army in any case. Eh, Army, you are willing to wear the gay coat for a while longer?"

"Certainly; I must agree, uncle," said the young man's voice; "but I do not deny that it will be hard for me to give up the thought of living in Castle Derenberg again—it was always my favorite idea."

"But not mine," interrupted Blanche, hastily. "I agree with Aunt Stontheim perfectly. I have already recently declared so."

"You do not know, Blanche," replied Army, and his deep voice seemed to tremble—"you do not know what a charm there is in such an old ancestral home! You cannot know, for you have never known the proud feeling of placing your foot on your own sill; no old walls, no deserted rooms, no primeval trees, have told you of long past times, when our ancestors lived and breathed here. It is a peculiarly proud feeling, which seized me even as a boy with all its force, when I ran through the lofty halls and rooms of our castle, and wandered around the park; and now it comes over me stronger than ever. It was my most beautiful dream to be established here again, where my ancestors in a long line had lived and died, and the non-fulfilment of this dream affects me very painfully, you may believe——"

"For Heaven's sake!" cried the young lady. "Now he becomes sentimental! I certainly cannot understand how one can cling to such an old rat and owl nest with so much tender longing. The smallest villa on the gay

Digitized by Google

boulevard of our capital seems to me a thousand times more alluring than this tiresome, deserted——"

"Hush, children!" interposed the colonel appeasingly. "Let every one keep his opinions for himself. You, Blanche, are just as dependent upon Aunt Stontheim's will as Army. What she decides, must be done; there is nothing to change, and I think we may drop the matter, and quarrel no longer."

"Very wisely remarked, colonel." The old lady now joined in the conversation, and her voice trembled with suppressed rage. "But how hard such dependence is to bear, only he can feel who has once been free. You do not feel it. You have never stood on your own land and domain. You grew up, so to speak, in dependence, and so it is easy to preach calmness to other people. I find it strange in the Stontheim; she has the means, and will not help. Army is to remain an officer, from the laughable, invented reason that he is yet too young, as if older strength did not stand at his side to advise and help him."

"You, perhaps, madame," laughed the colonel. "Certainly not badly planned. Financial ability cannot be gainsaid you. Who can help it that you were unlucky in all your speculations?"

"You are just as unimprovably malicious as formerly, Sir Colonel, when I had the happiness to see you here several times. But in this instance your accusations do not hit me, for it was really misfortune which followed us."

"Undeserved misfortune," said the colonel, with ironical emphasis.

"Uncle, pray let us leave off. It excites mamma," begged Army.

Digitized by Google

"And, my boy," continued the colonel, unconfusedly and emphatically, "to prevent just such *undeserved* misfortune once more Countess Stontheim wishes that you do not here—do you understand? just not here—pass the first years of your marriage. Pardon that I must speak so plainly. I would willingly have avoided it——"

"I understand," said the old lady, coldly. "Countess Stontheim still has the unfortunate idea that I am to blame for the ruin of the whole family. She hurled this reproach harshly and unevasively in my face at that time, when grief and need burst upon us. It must be some one's fault," she continued, laughing bitterly; "and as, from the first, they had treated me as an intruder, and never could endure the stranger, the Italian, so it was so easy to heap this fault upon her also. *Va bene!* You tell me nothing new, colonel. I only regret that any one is so—so——" She broke off; evidently she had a very harsh expression on her tongue. The colonel did not answer.

"Uncle," asked Army, hastily, "what does this mean? It is surely impossible that aunt asserts that grandmamma——"

"Silence!" cried the old lady, and at the same time one heard the rolling of a chair over the parquet.

But Lieschen and Nelly sat breathlessly beside each other, and held each other's hands. When the former had heard her father's name mentioned she had sprung up, and had looked round the room helplessly; but there was no way of escape except through that room in which they had just so hatefully soiled her good name. The young girl's slender form was pressed, as if in acute terror, against one of the high, locked

Digitized by Google

folding doors, behind which was a suite of empty rooms.

"Where shall I go?" she whispered, anxiously, to her friend.

"Stay here, Lieschen!" begged Nelly, and drew her

to her. "They cannot know that we can hear all so plainly. Ah! please do not cry," she implored. "Oh, if I were only well, and a man like Army, I would teach them decency when they spoke of you!" She clinched her little fists angrily.

Within, they heard the old lady walking up and

Digitized by Google

down, and each time that her steps approached the door Lieschen started up and looked anxiously round the room, as if she sought a place of concealment.

All at once Blanche's voice rang out—so coaxingly; the soft sound was as sweet as music now.

"Grandmamma," begged she, "I have a request to make of you. I commissioned Army to make it, but he seems to have forgotten it, the wretch! Yes, indeed; do not look so surprised, you," she continued, laughing roguishly; "your betrothed did not behave so, grandmamma, did he? He always read your wishes in your beautiful eyes."

The last words sounded more plainly than the beginning of the request; evidently the beautiful *fiancée* now stood close to the old lady, by the door.

"Now she throws her arms round grandmamma's neck like a cat," whispered Nelly. "Oh, she can beg and caress, Lieschen. You do not know."

"Well?" sounded the old lady's voice.

"I commissioned Army, grandmamma, to beg you to permit me to live in the tower room, which adjoins my room. Oh, please, please, grandmamma, *amatissima mia!*"

"It was very sensible in Army not to ask me. I had already refused him once, and, alas, cannot fulfil your wish."

"Why not?" asked Blanche, in a changed tone.

"You will permit me to keep the reason to myself."

"Do not tease, Blanche, do you hear?" said the colonel's voice. "Old castles have their secrets, and among them many which one gladly lets rest."

At this moment the door was opened, and the old lady suddenly stood in the room opposite the two girls.

Digitized by Google

Lieschen had sprung up; she no longer tried to flee, but stood perfectly motionless. The evening glow just

lit up the sky, throwing a purple reflection through the windows and surrounding the charming, girlish figure with a rosy light. The old baroness started back as if she saw a ghost, and stretched her hands out from her, "*Dio mio!* It is unheard of!" cried she, and stamped her foot. "Are you always here only to frighten me?"

"I am sorry, baroness, that I always have the misfortune——"

"Certainly strange to be frightened by such a lovely apparition!" said the colonel. He had entered the doorway, and looked admiringly at the young girl. "May

Digitized by Google

I ask, madame, that you introduce me to the young lady."

The one addressed only shrugged her shoulders, while she glanced almost compassionately at the old man and went to the window.

"Well, then, I must introduce myself. Mademoiselle, Colonel von Derenberg!" said he, courteously.

"This is my friend, uncle—Lieschen Erving," Nelly completed the introduction. The young girl bowed slightly.

"Erving?" repeated the old man, questioningly.

"The daughter of the present owner of the Derenberg forests, uncle," said Nelly, and rested her eyes full on his somewhat flushed face.

"Ah, indeed!" replied he. "For that reason the name seemed so familiar to me. Your father is probably a lover of noble forests?"

"Yes, colonel, and besides that, he needs much wood in his paper factory."

"Ah, your father has a paper factory. But wood—I think the best paper is usually made of rags?"

A roguish smile flew over Lieschen's face.

"Certainly, colonel. For that reason our factory is called in all the country round the rag-mill, my father the rag-miller, and I the rag-miller's Lieschen." Her whole lovely face now laughed.

"Rag-miller's Lieschen?" repeated the colonel, smiling also, and looked merrily at her. "That is certainly a name which seems unsuited to you."

"Still, I like it," said she. "Every child calls me so; all the daughters of our house have had this name, either the rag-miller's Gretchen, or Minna, or Lisette——" She was frightened when she uninten-

Digitized by Google

tionally mentioned this name, and glanced shyly over at the old lady, who still stood by the window, and just now turned round as quickly as if a gnat had stung her.

"Lisette?" repeated she. "You have just mentioned a name which you cannot speak so proudly. This Lisette was a wayward girl, who caused her parents great grief——"

"The memory of Great-aunt Lisette is sacred to me," replied the young girl, apparently calmly. "She was not wayward, she was only very unhappy; but, as I am assured, not through her *own* fault, baroness." Her lips trembled with excitement as she spoke these words, and the stormy beating of her heart sounded in her voice.

"Naturally!" cried the old lady, mockingly. "Such a one arranges the affair as best suits her; however, it was best for the 'unhappy' Lisette that she died early, before she and her family——"

"Baroness!" the young girl interrupted her, almost threateningly, "it is little noble to heap disgrace even upon the grave of one who——" She seized her hat, but the hands which took it trembled.

"What is this about a Lisette? Who was she?" asked, with interest, Blanche, who had just entered the room. "Who is heaping disgrace upon her, and what did she do?" She now stood between Lieschen and the grandmother, and turned her head quickly from one to the other.

"Do not be so immoderately curious, my child," said the colonel. "I already told you that old castles have their secrets, and——"

"Who tells you, then, colonel, that the castle has

Digitized by Google

anything to do with that affair?" The old lady had grown deathly pale.

"Well," replied he, thoughtfully, and glanced at her sharply, "I can put two and two together——"

"It is a great pity, colonel, that you are not a romance-writer. You have mistaken your career."

"Good-bye, Nelly," whispered Lieschen, bending down to her and pressing a kiss on her friend's cheek; then she bowed slightly to the others and left the room. She fairly flew along the corridor and over the open place before the castle. In the linden alley she suddenly stood before a form. It was Army.

"Miss Erving——" She looked up at him; his expression was serious. "Miss Erving," he repeated, "did you hear what was said in our sitting-room?"

"Yes," replied she, firmly.

"It is not very—how shall I say?—very discreet to listen when family affairs are discussed——"

"I did not listen, baron," cried she, proudly. "If there had been another exit from the room I would gladly have left it; very gladly, for——"

"You could have gone through the sitting-room——"

"No. Your mother herself has forbidden me to cross your grandmother's path, for she cannot bear me. I am a daughter of the house in which one cannot associate in a proper manner, lieutenant. You know, therefore, that I was forced to remain. I would rather have sprung from the window." A bitter expression lay about the little mouth as she spoke these words.

"Well, in any case, I would like to ask you not to speak of what you have heard. The sacrifice of not spreading further these piquant representations is surely a hard one—I believe it; our family has always afforded

Digitized by Google

abundant material for conversation in the neighboring circles, but I think you will make this sacrifice, for, as I remind you, we were formerly faithful friends, were we not, Lieschen?" He held out his hand, but the young girl drew back, and folded her arms over her breast.

"It scarcely needs a promise," replied she dully; "besides, I should in any case have been silent, for part of your conversation would have deeply insulted my father—my father, in whose house you so gladly came at that time when we were the 'faithful friends,' as you just now remarked."

He stepped back, surprised. "What? I did not say a word about your father."

"But listened while they called him a *parvenu*—when they said that he hated the nobility, and the Derenberg family—and that he thought of revenge—and the calm hearing of a calumny, while one is inwardly convinced of its untruth, is a confirmation of the same. And not alone my father—no, they also attack the daughters of our house. My poor Great-aunt

Digitized by Google

Lisette, who was so beautiful and so good—she was a wayward girl, said your grandmother, and yet I know that it is not true. Oh, it hurts so!" Now the passionate tears broke out, and she flew down the alley like a hunted thing. She did not hear how he called "Lieschen!" did not see how long he looked after her, and only after her slender figure had disappeared walked slowly and with gloomy brow hesitatingly back to the castle.

When Army entered the large room where the others were some peace seemed to have returned after the storm; at least, every one was silent. The colonel had lighted a cigarette, and in an apparently comfortable frame of mind leaned back in one of the deep old-fashioned arm-chairs, while the old baroness sat upright on the sofa, and in nervous haste played with her slender white fingers. But Blanche stood in a deep window niche and looked out into the park; the long riding habit trailed motionlessly on the old parquet, and she remained immovable when her betrothed approached her side. He did not notice the displeased question of the old lady, who called to him to know where his mother was, and whether she would not come back soon. He only saw the charming figure near by, which seemed, in the tight-fitting riding habit, still more fragile, more childlike, than ever; and he softly took one of the heavy golden strands of hair which lay loosened on the dark cloth and pressed it to his lips. But the young lady, without looking round, shook her head violently, and her little hands quickly clutched the hair and drew it over her shoulder.

"Blanche!" said he, reproachfully, and bent forward to look in her face. She turned away her head and

Digitized by Google

looked out, apparently with interest, into the quiet green garden.

"Have I offended you, Blanche?" asked he softly. "Are you angry with me?"

With a hasty gesture she held both hands to her ears. "No, no; for heaven's sake, no!" cried she, passionately, turning her back. "I beg you, Armand, do not ask such absurd questions! You see that for the moment I have no inclination to listen to your whispers of love and your tenderness. Any one else would have understood at once, and you ask if I am angry, and Heaven knows what nonsense!" She stamped her foot angrily.

Army's face had become dark-red. "Pardon," said he, and went to the piano. He opened it and struck a few chords.

"Pray do not play!" cried Blanche, and again put her hands to her ears. He rose. "Then pray play yourself," begged he. "I should like to hear a little music—there is something so calming, reconciling in it." "Yes, please play, my love," cried the colonel also, who had heard only the last of this little scene, and who found it pleasant to overcome the painful feeling between himself and the old lady in this manner.

"On that instrument?" asked she. "No, I cannot play on that. I cannot bear to hear the jangling tone. Besides, I am too tired from my long ride," she added.

For a moment Army's eyes flashed angrily; then he walked up to the despised old instrument, closed the lid, and again went up to his betrothed. She had taken up her little riding-whip, and played with its silver handle, while the old lady rose and left the room.

"I think you are really tired, or else it was more

Digitized by Google

than mere caprice when you refused to play at my request," he remarked, with enforced calm.

"Think so, dear boy—think so!" said the old gentleman, laughing, and clapped him on the shoulder. "One gets on best so. I see you will agree splendidly with her."

Army bit his lips.

"May I lead you to your room?" he then asked, turning to his betrothed. "I propose to you to lie down and rest a little; perhaps I will hear something from you after dinner, eh?"

"I think not," replied she; "for I have a headache, and will remain in my room to-day."

The colonel laughed. "Well, good night, then, and a happy recovery," and with that, still smiling, and nodding to his nephew, he left the room. Blanche laid the train of her habit over her arm, and followed him. She walked past her *fiancée* without saying a word.

"Blanche!" said he softly, and barred her way, "will you not bid me good night?"

"You treat me like a naughty child," cried she passionately, and stepped back. "I am surprised that you do not desire me to beg your pardon. It is all the same to you whether I have a headache or not——"

"Neither the one nor the other. I neither desire an apology nor deny my regret that you have a headache; but it is impossible for me to go from you so without 'good night.' That is really not agreeable—is it, Blanche? When two people love each other as we two do, then the desire for an explanation, for an understanding, is so natural."

He had come nearer to her with these words, and wished to draw her to him, but she repulsed him impa-

Digitized by Google

tiently, and for a moment a mocking expression was on her face.

"If you really loved me," she replied, roughly, "you would not give me such silly moral lectures when you know that I am ill. It is fearful," she added. "What an idea you seem to have of our mutual position. This eternal consideration, this submission of one to the other, without daring to express a free opinion; this exaltation—it is an oppressive, horrible chain, but no happiness. I will be free—do you hear? —free!" she repeated, and immediately after the heavy door slammed behind the delicate form.

He stood there as if stunned, and stared at the door behind which she had vanished from his gaze. It had become quiet in the large room, the purple glow had faded from the sky, and the gray veil of evening sunk gloomily down and filled the room with twilight. The young man

Digitized by Google

walked to the window and looked fixedly out into the evening landscape, his lips pressed together as if in deepest displeasure; but then he started—from above, sounds met his ear. Hastily he opened the window. Upstairs the Faust waltzes were being played, with such rhythm and swing as only she could play them. The runs rolled out like pearls, and in between in a masterly manner, the melody stood out.

"She is playing!" he murmured, and his clinched fist fell angrily upon the hard window-sill. " 'Are they without maliciousness, truly 'tis a happiness,' " he laughed bitterly, and left the room.

Outdoors a soft, mild evening air surrounded him. He involuntarily directed his steps along the castle moat, from which the elder trees with the faded blossoms stretched their branches, and then stood under her window. The old tower rose close beside him, and the white climbing rose which clambered up on it shone out brightly near him in the darkness. Upstairs the playing ceased. But no, it began again—a gloomy, sad melody. How affecting it sounded! Then the music suddenly ceased with a shrill discord.

Army drew a deep breath, as if relieved. His heart, which loved so honestly and ardently, could in vain fathom his *fiancée's* manner. This evening, with all its force, the dreaded question forced itself upon him: "If she does not love you?" and "Rather death than renounce her!" he murmured, walking on, and involuntarily thought of Agnes Mechthilde, and the Baron von Streitwitz, who was buried here in the garden. Out of tune, he turned into the leafy green walk which lay nearest him. This afternoon, with all its unpleasant experiences, again rose before him. Repulsive thoughts

Digitized by Google

took possession of him. The remembrance of the conversation between uncle and grandmother, with the many malicious insinuations, which threw a hateful, distorted light, like flaming torches, on the past; the thought of Blanche's obstinate declaration that she did not wish to live here, and then the reproachful words which Lieschen had called to him there in the alley when he wished to ask her not to betray anything she had heard! They had shamed him deeply, those simple words, the pained, reproachful glance. He had allowed the brave man down there in the mill to be calumniated, without speaking a word in his defence, from thoughtlessness; his interested attention had followed the exchange of words which so roughly shattered his favorite wish—the wish to live here with Blanche in the castle of his fathers. But Lieschen must believe that he thought just as—— "Oh, no, no; certainly not. Her father is an honorable, brave man." Finally, all that was wholly indifferent—no, what had last occurred, had left the deepest sting in his breast. His *fiancée's* violent words again rang in his ears: "What an idea you have of our mutual position!" And then, "It is a chain, an oppressive chain, but no happiness!"

"A chain!" he repeated, in an undertone, while he remained standing; but then he said, quickly: "Ah, bah! girlish caprice, nothing else. She is too beautiful, too proud, a too peculiar character to fit the narrow sphere which is really a wife's." He should have thought of that, he pondered; he should not try again and again to win her to his opinions—it must be wearisome for her; she was right to be vexed, his beautiful, proud, beloved *fiancée*. And she surely loved him:

Digitized by Google

she had so often assured him of it in reply to his stormy questions. In the autumn, Uncle Derenberg had said—in the autumn she would be wholly his, irrevocably his. Should not all present pain vanish before this blessed certainty?

The night-wind had risen, and blew the branches together over the young man's head, so that they rustled softly. It rumpled the surface of the dark pond at Army's feet and drove his sad thoughts far away; brought reconciling love and soft, sweet longing through the quiet summer night; and "In the autumn," said Army, once more—"in the autumn comes happiness."

Digitized by Google

X.

SUMMER was past. Autumn entered upon his rule, and began to paint the foliage of the forests gayly; a crystal clear blue sky arched itself over the earth, in the linden walk of the castle park the first withered leaves lay on the ground, and in the miller's garden the asters and dahlias bloomed in the gayest splendor of colors. Nets were drawn over the vine trellises, to guard the clusters from the greedy sparrows; and in the orchard the ripened fruit showed invitingly its red and yellow cheeks, and waited to be gathered.

Everything in the mill had gone on as usual. How quickly the summer had passed! And now they looked forward to the long winter evenings beside the warm stove. The people in the mill looked forward to something else, in truth; they all knew, the workmen in the factory as well as Minnie and Dorte in the kitchen, and Peter in the stable, that there would soon be a bride in the house: whoever had eyes to see, for him it was as clear as day that Mr. Selldorf and "our Lieschen" would be engaged. Love shone so plainly from the handsome biond man's honest blue eyes; and the master had not been so intimate and cordial with any one, and none of his colleagues had received such pleasant looks from the eyes of Liesel's mother as he. Even Auntie always nodded to him benevolently, and in the kitchen, if they spoke of him, said, "A fine man, Selldorf!" Only Lieschen seemed to notice nothing of

Digitized by Google

all this; to be sure, she was always pleasant to him, and polite, according to her father's wish, and placed the large bunches of forget-me-nots which he sometimes brought her carefully in water; but no one could perceive the love which she should feel for him, however much trouble Minnie and Dora gave themselves.

"She only acts so," said the latter, "because that is the fashion with the gentry; but really she feels differently—eh, Auntie?"

"Who gossips much, lies much!" Auntie had answered. "Do not trouble yourself about Liesel, but stay with your cooking-pots. There will be a wedding in the house some time. Who the groom will be, God only knows. We cannot see into the future, and therefore hold your tongue about things which do not concern you. But you have nothing else in your head but men-folk and marriage. Liesel knows very well what she is about." And then she nodded her head gravely. But, however much weight her words usually had, this time her speech went in one ear and out of the other; they knew very well, the girls, that Mr. Selldorf had an eye on the young lady, and time would show who was right.

Meanwhile Auntie laid in her winter supplies in cellar and dining-room with customary diligence, and Lieschen must be present and assist everywhere; for, "See, my heart, you must learn it for your future housekeeping," said the old woman. To-day a shaking and beating of the nut trees had been going on all the after noon behind the house, and leaves and nuts fell to the ground, on which a great sheet lay spread out. Peter and Christel were beating the branches pitilessly with long sticks, and three or four children scrambled around

Digitized by Google

joyously on the ground, and fairly fell over each other in the haste of gathering.

"Nut-gathering; oh, nut-gathering!" now cried a fresh voice, and in the next moment Nelly's rosy face bent over Lieschen's shoulder and pressed a hearty

kiss on her cheek. "I saw it all from afar," said she. "The poor trees! Good day, Auntie."

"Oh, nut trees and donkeys must be beaten," answered the latter, and wiped her hands on her clean apron before she reached them to the young girl in welcome. "Good day, Nelly, and how are you? What are you doing, and how is your mamma?"

Digitized by Google

"Thank you, Auntie, pretty well; we now have so much to do about Army's wedding. See, Lieschen, I have brought my work with me," said she, and pointed to a little basket, from which peeped gay wools. "But you, probably, must help here?"

"No, to-day she can do what she will," said Auntie, "but to-morrow there will be plums to stone for preserving; no doctor can help her from that; she must know how it is done. I will spare her the nuts—that makes one's hands yellow, my dear — but to-morrow——"

"To-morrow I will certainly help, Auntie," nodded Lieschen, and her blue eyes looked pleasantly at the old woman, while she had seized her friend by the hand to draw her away.

"Where are you going?" Auntie called after them. "Are you going to stay in the garden, or are you going up to your room, Liesel?"

"In the garden," cried the girls; "it is so pleasant and sunny; we will go to the arbor."

The two young girls walked, arm in arm, through the long walk of the lower part of the garden, and Auntie looked after them. Lieschen's slender form towered considerably above her friend; her head was somewhat lowered, and the fine dark blue woolen dress encased a figure of the most charming, moderate proportions. Nelly had leaned her curly blonde head back, and looked up at her, talking; she seemed like a child near Lieschen. Soon they sat in the already somewhat leafless jasmine arbor, and the rays of the autumn sun fell on the gay embroidery which Nelly had spread out upon the table, and which now was being admired by both.

Digitized by Google

"Do you not think I have been industrious, Liesel?" asked the girl, happily.

"Very," replied she. "You will soon have finished it. How very pretty this wreath of oak leaves is, surrounding the coat-of-arms."

"Is it not?" said Nelly, proudly. "And the best of it is that mamma drew the pattern. However, Lieschen, I must be very industrious, for, only think, the wedding is on the 15th of October!"

A shadow suddenly fell upon Lieschen's face. "The 15th of October!" she repeated softly. Nelly's smiling expression also disappeared, and she looked dreamily out into the garden; but then she eagerly seized her embroidery, and put stitch after stitch in the fine canvas. For a while there was silence between them; at last Nelly let her needle rest and glanced at the young girl who sat there idly, and thoughtfully held her fine crochet work in her hand.

"What are you thinking about, Lieschen?" asked she. "I was just thinking of former times. Do you remember when Army was here for his autumn holidays, and we all gathered nuts, or, early in the morning, ran through the dew to the spring?"

Lieschen nodded. "Do you know," continued Nelly, "I wish the wedding were all over. I think I shall cry myself sick when I see him standing before the altar with—with his bride," she added softly.

"But why, Nelly?" was the anxious reply.

"Listen, Lieschen; I have spoken with no one about it, and you no longer come to us since—well, since that afternoon, you know, when I was ill, and you, so contrary to your wishes, must hear the conversation——"

"I told you, Nelly, I cannot. If your grandmamma

Digitized by Google

had blamed me, then—but my father, my good father—no, Nelly, I——"

"I know, Lieschen. Please do not look as if you were going to cry. I lost the most by that. But you are perfectly right. I only mean that, in consequence, you could not observe Blanche's whole manner as I——"

"She is so very beautiful, Nelly!"

"But what do I care about the beauty when she is heartless and cold, and when, above all things, she does not love Army."

"Pray, Nelly," cried Lieschen, crimson, "who says that? You certainly imagine it."

"No, no, certainly not. I already have told mamma so, and she tries to soothe me. She affects every one with her beauty, this Blanche."

Lieschen had pressed her lips together, and did not answer a syllable, but her face was still deeply flushed. Nelly laid her work aside and walked round the table to her friend, sat down on the bench beside her, and threw her arm round her. "Liesel," said she, and her eyes filled with tears, "if you knew what a deadly anxiety I have for him! See, I always think if a girl loves a man, she is different from Blanche. God knows, he must love her very dearly! And," she continued, as Lieschen started at the last sentence, but continued silent, "she is so hateful to my mother; she has only once written to her since her departure, and very shortly and coolly; and recently, when mamma was so very ill again, and we feared the worst, Army told her about it, but she did not once ask him how we fared here. Ah, I know mamma is just as worried about Army as I," she concluded, and tried to suppress the tears which had come to her eyes.

Digitized by Google

"I wrote to Army," she began again, "and he answered he had told her how much she wounded him

and us by her behavior, but he also said in his letter that I should not be so vexed with her; she had been brought up so differently, and would certainly change. Now, I ask you, Lieschen, must I not be worried about him?"

She still did not answer, but with face turned away gazed out into the sunny garden. "Lieschen!" coaxed the girl poutingly, still struggling with her tears and as Lieschen slowly turned her head towards her, large tears sparkled in her blue eyes also. "How sorry I am!" said she, and pressed Nelly's hand. "I always thought it was all such a joy and happiness——"

Digitized by Google

"Grandmamma indeed says," interrupted Nelly, "that it is a great happiness, and the only possibility of freeing us from many cares, although she has now come down a little in her exalted opinion of Blanche. She may well have imagined everything differently; and she is not going to the wedding."

"But you, Nelly?"

"Mamma and I, naturally," said the girl. "Lawyer Hellwig was with mamma a short time ago. Something of a trousseau must be gotten for Army, and then our wardrobe—no, we must go; he is our only son and brother."

"I am chilly," said Lieschen, suddenly shuddering. "The sun is gone. Come, Nelly, let us go in and drink our coffee in the sitting-room."

When they came out of the garden, Auntie came to meet them with the coffee utensils from the door. "Here you are," cried she pleasantly. "Will you take your coffee inside or here?"

"Oh, here; it is protected by the house," replied Lieschen, and with her apron brushed the withered leaves from the stone table. "Does that suit you, Nelly?" The latter assented, and gazed at her friend.

"If only you are not chilly; you look so pale, Lieschen!"

"Oh, no, not here," said she, and helped the old woman spread a white cloth over the table. "There was a breeze from the water down there. Auntie, you will drink some coffee with us out here, will you not?"

"That I can do," replied the old woman. "There is a visitor in the sitting-room." She seated herself beside Nelly on the bench, and asked Lieschen to fill her

Digitized by Google

a cup. "So industrious?" said she, then, as the young girl near her began to zealously embroider again.

"A wedding present for Army," replied she, pleasantly.

"Dear me," said the old woman, and took the filled cup from Lieschen's hand with thanks; "he is still very young. It always seems to me as if it were only yesterday that he came springing over the mill bridge in his black velvet dress." Nelly nodded, but Lieschen involuntarily glanced at the little bridge, under which the clear water flowed briskly.

"Who is in there with father?" asked she, with constrained voice, as if she wished to turn the conversation, at the same time she smiled at her mother, whose face was visible for a moment at the window.

"A strange gentleman—I do not know him," answered Auntie, but then suddenly set her cup down, adjusted her spectacles, and glanced sharply at the path on the other side of the stream. "Great heavens!" said she then, "was not that Sanna, Nelly, who walked there between the trees? Now she is behind the elms and willows. I have not seen her for a long time, but I think it is her walk. See, really it is she," cried she, and then pointed to the large form in the dark dress and the white apron which hurriedly crossed the bridge.

"Sanna!" cried Nelly also, and sprung up. "Heavens! what has happened?"

"The baroness requests," said the old servant's voice, with its foreign accent—her hard features seemed flushed from her hurried walk—"that mademoiselle should come to her immediately."

"For God's sake, Sanna," asked the young girl

Digitized by Google

hastily, gathering up her embroidery, "what has happened? Shall I come to mamma or grandmamma?"

"To your grandmamma, naturally," replied the old woman, without even looking at Lieschen or Auntie, who were helping the friend put her gay worsted in the basket. "Your grandmamma is very angry that you were not at home, so angry that I at once got ready and ran here, because your mamma thought you were at the mill again, and Henry had no time—he had to carry a letter to the post."

"But tell me, Sanna," begged Nelly, and looked up anxiously at the large, thin woman, "is any one ill, or has bad news arrived?"

"Your grandmamma has received a letter with some sad news," replied the old woman, and glanced darkly at Auntie, who had risen.

"For God's sake!" cried Nelly, and looked up at Sanna in terror, "it surely is not Army? Sanna, dearest Sanna, you surely know. Please tell me, I beg you," and she ran up to her and seized her hands pleadingly. But Lieschen sat down on the stone bench; it seemed to her that her feet would no longer carry her; and, as if out of her mind, she gazed with great, wide-opened eyes at the group.

"I do not know," replied the old servant, shrugging her shoulders, while Nelly put her hands over her face and cried out again, sobbing,

"Army! Merciful God! if it were Army!"

"Calm yourself, Nelly dear," Auntie now consoled her, and took the weeping girl in her arms. "It is not your brother, or else she would not stand there so calmly. Go home quickly, and be consoled. It is not he."

Digitized by Google

"Oh, Auntie," sobbed she, "I can scarcely stand from fear."

"Do not cry, mademoiselle," now said old Sanna, sharply emphasizing the "mademoiselle." "Countess Stontheim is dead; but your grandmammma forbade me to speak of it here in the mill, because she wishes, if possible, to avoid all gossip, and here——"

She swallowed the rest, while she gave a hostile glance at Auntie, who was still standing near the weeping girl.

"Well, well," remarked Auntie, "you might keep it to yourselves forever, Miss Sanna. What does it concern me whether the countess is dead or not? But you do not need to frighten the poor child so with your news of death; it was time enough if she learned it at home."

"I have nothing to do with you at all. I do what my mistress commands," replied the old servant scornfully.

"Oh, yes. I know you from formerly," said Auntie, whose blood had suddenly rushed to her face. She looked piercingly at her enemy.

"I will walk a little way with you, Nelly," cried Lieschen, as if waking from sleep, and followed her friend, hurrying on ahead, while Sanna made no effort to follow her, but rather stood as if rooted to the ground.

"What do you mean?" asked she, and looked, with an expression of unappeasable hostility at Auntie, who was collecting the coffee serivce. Since long years these two women for the first time again stood opposite each other; they had grown old, but the hatred which had burned in their youth had gently smouldered on, and in this moment flamed up brightly again.

Digitized by Google

"What do I mean?" replied Auntie and, her great honest eyes fixed upon the tall, dark figure, fearlessly came a step nearer. "What do I mean? Oh, Miss Sanna, you should not ask that. I see by your face that

you know—know very well; it surely has often enough sat on your pillow, and made you toss and tumble, and

Digitized by Google

kept you from sleeping in the long, dreadful nights, and lain on you like a nightmare, which would not vanish even if you prayed a hundred times to your rosary, and called upon all your saints—that was conscience, Miss Sanna, and a bad conscience has wolf's teeth, which strike sharply and deeply——"

"Oh, *misericordia!*" cried Sanna, and struck her hands together with a passionate gesture of rage, "that is what I get for coming here myself; the baroness was right when she always forbid us to associate with this *plebaglio*, these *miserabile.*"

"What your baroness says is wholly indifferent to me," declared Auntie; "and you can spare your Italian words, which I do not understand; but one thing I must say to you, Miss Sanna, as chance has brought us together again; I have long wished to do so. You and your baroness, you carry a sin on your conscience which cries to heaven. Perhaps you thought that no one knew of it; perhaps you rightly guessed that there is one who knows the deed, and how it happened that a young, blooming life must sink into the grave; but I tell you —and you can tell the gracious lady up there—God looks through his fingers for a long time, but not forever, and He will not be mocked; and I—I, the old Auntie in the paper mill—will one day tell it to your proud mistress's face, that she is a——"

"*Ailo!*" hissed the Italian, and beat the air with her hands; "what a crazy person! I am surprised that you do not say that we murdered the arrogant thing."

"I could assert that with perfect right," declared Auntie. "And if no one was more arrogant than she the world would fare well."

"Shall I let that be said to me?" cried old Sanna,

Digitized by Google

flushing crimson. "Will you not, perhaps, also assert that we gave her poison or strangled her? If Miss Lisette died, it was her own fault. What right had she to imagine that the baron would marry her? Why did she have a love-affair beyond her rank? Such a gentleman has a hundred eyes, and sees more than one girl."

"So?" now cried the old woman, and set down the tray with the cups, which she had just raised. "Will you calumniate Baron Fritz also? He was better than the whole crowd up there"—she pointed to the castle—"taken together, and if he became a wild fellow it was your fault. Why did you take away his love from him? As to imagination, the blessed Lisette imagined nothing at all. She was honorably betrothed to Baron Fritz, and as truly as I stand here she would have become his wife if false, miserable people still worse than robbers and murderers had not torn them apart."

Sanna laughed roughly and scornfully.

"Do you really think so? And I tell you, as truly as she was rag-miller's Lisette, so truly is there no place for such up there."

"Arrogance always leaves its trail," said Auntie scornfully. "Thank God! our kind are too good and too brave, and are not suited to such a sinful household as was up there at that time. The Derenbergs were always people of the good old kind; nobility was not only in their blood, but also in their hearts, and so was it right; but since then—now you know what I mean—they would have turned in their old family vault if they had known how far it would go with their proud family."

"Auntie! Auntie!" cried the anxious voice of the mistress of the house from the window.

Digitized by Google

"Immediately, Minna," replied she, and picked up the tray. "I am coming already. You know we old women like to talk over old affairs, especially when one has not seen the other for so long as Miss Sanna and I," and then she crossed the threshold without once looking round.

"But, Auntie, for Heaven's sake!" said Mrs. Erving reproachfully, as the old woman entered the room with flushed face, "what have you been saying? I was afraid, the great, gloomy person looked so furious——"

"I was not, Minna—I was not," replied the old woman, triumphantly. "It did me good to be able to speak once. I have waited for it for years. At times I even believed I must die without once telling them to their faces what a great sin they had committed, and now to-day—oh, I was much too mild; but if I had not had the false woman under God's open sky, but in my room, then you should have heard, Minna——"

"Auntie, Auntie! 'Vengeance is mine!' What would the pastor say if he saw you now?"

"I do not wish to revenge myself," said the old woman softly, "for revenge always has an after-sting. But, believe me, as I saw her standing there, the woman who helped on the misfortune, it seemed to me as if some one poured boiling oil into my heart——" She broke off, for just then Lieschen entered the room.

"Countess Stontheim is really dead," said she. "Nelly's mother said so when she met us in the park. Army wrote she was to be buried to-morrow, and after the burial he will bring his betrothed. The wedding will not be postponed; all is to remain as before. Tell me, Auntie, was Sanna, whom I just met on the forest path, with you until now?"

Digitized by Google

"Until now, my darling; we had a merry conversation together."

The young girl glanced anxiously and questioningly at her; she then seated herself at the window and looked dreamily out at the tops of the tall lindens for a long time. Occasionally a yellow leaf fell down slowly, and a crowd of little birds fluttered, chirping, from branch to branch. She scarcely saw it, she had so much to think of, and then her hands clasped each other, and her red lips moved silently. It had grown quiet in the cosey sitting-room. Auntie had long been busy elsewhere with the housekeeping, and in the adjoining room the mother walked about here and there arranging things.

"If he had died!" she whispered, under her breath. But, no—no—it is better so; dear God, let him be happy—for his mother's and Nelly's sakes!" she added hesitatingly.

Several days had elapsed; Lieschen had industriously assisted Auntie, and, more frequently than had been usual of late, her clear laugh had rung out. "Laugh, my darling," said the old woman once, in great joy, "for God loves laughter." "She is growing happy again—she has gotten over it," thought she. The child was so young, and life lay before her so wide and happy, and then, involuntarily, another picture rose to her mind—that of the handsome blond man. "They would make a handsome pair," whispered she, half aloud. "I only recently discovered how very nice he is, when the little boy fell into the water, and he so unhesitatingly sprung in, and then gave the mother—the lame beggar woman—a piece of money for the fright she had had."

Digitized by Google

And to-day she had looked after him for a while, as, early in the morning, with gun over his shoulder, he had gone hunting with the master, and had noticed very plainly how a quick glance flew up at the window behind which Lieschen still slept soundly, and thought, "If she could see him now. No one can look finer." But Lieschen had no ear for her when, afterwards, she had praised him, and had only laughingly turned the conversation again and again to something else. Now it was noon, the soup was steaming on the table in the dining-room, and, outside, Lieschen sprung to meet her returning father.

"Good morning, papa!" cried she happily. "What do you bring with you?" Then for the first time she perceived that behind him stood Mr. Selldorf, who had taken his green hat from his curly head, laid his right hand in her father's, and looked at him with a beseeching glance.

"Until this evening, then, dear Selldorf," she heard her father say, then another hand-shake, and the young man had disappeared without looking at her. The stately man greeted his little daughter absently and threw down his hunting bag. "Where is mother? I must speak to your mother," said he hurriedly.

"But, Frederick, the soup!" cried Auntie from the kitchen.

"Yes, sure enough—afterwards, then," said he. But at table he often passed his hand over his face, and then he smiled, and suddenly became grave again. Once he looked so closely at Lieschen, and with that so sadly, that she put down her fork, and asked,

"Father, what has happened to you?" and "Erving. has anything unpleasant occurred?" asked his wife.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"Oh, no, indeed!" replied he gayly, and forced himself to be merry. And immediately after a hurried meal he followed his wife into the sitting-room. Lieschen walked up and down in the garden, and meanwhile glanced apprehensively at the sitting-room windows; at length she went into the house again, but then Auntie came into the room, and motioned to her to remain outside.

She seated herself, full of dim forebodings, on the stone bench under the window. Within, something was animatedly discussed, and at length she heard Auntie's voice, "No, Frederick; one thing you must promise me—if she does not wish to, then do not persuade her, for a forced marriage is perpetual misery."

"Naturally," replied the father; "but still one can represent to her all the advantages and disadvantages."

The young girl there on the old stone bench had suddenly grown pale as death. All at once clearness had come to her, as to what was discussed within. Had she, then, lived in a dream? Her parents, her dear, good father—could they be willing to give her away? She must go away from the dear old mill with a strange man. Away from her mother, Auntie, and all who were dear and whom she trusted? She should no longer live in her little room, no longer see the tower of the old castle over there? She pressed her hands to her breast, and it seemed to her that she heard her heart beat at this idea.

"Lieschen, come in here," now called her father. Mechanically she rose and obeyed. There she now stood in the sitting-room; on the sofa sat her mother, at the window Auntie, and both looked at her so

Digitized by Google

strangely, so tenderly—yes, it seemed as if her mother had wept.

The old woman at the window rose and went out; she did not wish to disturb in what the parents now had to say to their child; she quietly went into her room, and took the Bible from the bureau, then she sat down in the old arm-chair, and folded her hands over the book. "God alone knows what is right," she whispered. "May He govern her heart, and so all will be well." Outdoors, the rays of the autumn sun lay on the gay asters, and long white threads hung like a silver veil around the almost leafless gooseberry bushes. "When spring comes again how will it be in this house?" She thought of her darling, who was now so suddenly placed before the most important decision of life; how will Lieschen receive the announcement? Had she really not remarked how dear she had become to the young man? And did she not like him a lit—— "Ah, no!" The old woman shook her head; she knew what was in the young heart. "No, she does not love him; and even if she gives him her consent—forces herself to it, because her parents wish it—would she then be happy? Ah! forced love and painted cheeks do not last. The poor child!" she whispered to herself. "If they only do not persuade her! Minna will not; but Frederick—Frederick is foolishly fond of the young man."

She opened the old book and glanced at the yellow leaves; but she could not read—the letters danced before her eyes, and her hands trembled; and now the door-knob was turned softly—will the face of a happy young betrothed now look in, covered with a deep blush? The old woman held her breath: then the door

Digitized by Google

opened slowly, and the young girl stood on the threshold. Had she grown since a little while before? She entered calmly, only her pale face was very grave.

"Auntie," said she softly, "I have said no."

The old woman did not answer; she only nodded her head as if in agreement. "You do not love him, child?" she then asked. "See, such marriage questions are peculiar things."

"I can love no one, Auntie," said a voice near the old woman's ear, and two soft arms were clasped round her neck, and a pale face hid itself on her breast. So she lay on her knees beside the old woman, who stroked the brown braids.

"God bless you, my Liesel!" whispered she. "You have done right."

In the sitting-room the miller walked excitedly up and down, and Mrs. Erving's eyes were red and tearful, and she pleaded:

"But still, if she does not love him, Erving!"

"Minna, it is quite too hard to speak sensibly with a woman on such subjects," said he, standing before her. "Just look at the boy! He is handsome, he is honorable; he loves her, is of a good family; his father writes me they will worship the girl—is not that all that she can desire? But there is something behind all this. I cannot be dissuaded from believing that."

"But, I beg you, Erving, what could it be?"

"And then, I do not know the girl—she, who usually is so obedient and docile—how she stood there with pale face, and said, 'no,' and nothing but 'no.' God help me! who would have thought that?"

"She is indeed your daughter, old fellow," pleaded Mrs. Erving, rising and going up to her husband.

Digitized by Google

"You know," she continued, attempting to smile, "how your father wished you should marry Agnes; then you, likewise, said 'no,' and nothing else."

"But still that was different; at that time I already knew you and loved you; but here—she has scarcely put her nose out of the nest. God knows, nothing has

ever been so hard for me as to bring the boy such news this evening."

He remained standing at the window, and looked displeasedly through the panes. "Really, when one thinks," he continued, and drummed impatiently on the window with his finger—"when one thinks what the

Digitized by Google

foolish girl rejects! I would have taken Selldorf into partnership; they could have lived here. Now, I see already it is our fault; we have spoiled her, and Auntie has put the crown to it all. God knows, it is very vexing!"

"But, Erving, Erving, I beg you! If one heard you! It is just as if you had never loved the child; as if you had only brought her up to marry her to your own advantage."

The voice sounded reproachful. He did not answer, also did not turn around when the door now softly opened and Auntie entered.

She stood for a moment. "Well, well, Minna!" then said she. "You are crying—no one is dead, and there is no such haste with courting. There is not a handful, there is a whole land full—the right one will come yet."

The miller, at the window, made a violent movement, as if he would answer sharply; then he said, calmly, "You speak as you understand, Auntie."

"Oh, I should think in such matters I did not exactly fall on my head, and have seen a little bit more of life than you. Liesel is seventeen years old—that is, scarcely out of her child shoes; a hundred wooers will yet come to the mill. Why, then, should she take the very first? He is a fine fellow, Selldorf—yes, but tastes differ, and love without love in return is a question without an answer, and causes unhappiness. And now let it be, good Frederick, and do not show her an angry face, for she is your only one. Why, then, will you force her? All the anger is of no use, and you cannot command in such affairs; therefore, let there be peace, and be glad that you can yet keep your child.

Digitized by Google

When she once has a husband, then she is no longer yours."

"Very good, very good!" he replied, impatiently, and began anew his wandering up and down the room. The old woman did not add another word; she knew that she had attained her aim; and so she took her stocking from her knitting-bag and seated herself in her chair.

"Have you spoken with her?" asked the mother, after a long pause.

"Certainly! She came to me, and told me how it was; and at last she cried, and begged me to help pacify her father."

"Where is she, then?" asked he.

"She went upstairs to her room."

"So?" replied he, and walked up and down again; but then he approached the door, and went out.

"I know where he is going," nodded the old woman, and smiled.

"Good Auntie," said the mother; "you always find the right words." And she came to her and with her delicate white hand stroked the old face; and then she bent down and pressed a kiss on the work-hardened hand. "You are——"

"Never mind that, Minna; do not make a fuss about it; it is not worth the trouble. He was really very angry?"

"It would have passed, Auntie; but I have never known him so vexed—it frightened me."

"Well, look, Minna," said she, and pointed out in the garden; and as they now looked out, the miller walked slowly down the path, his arm around his little daughter, and she had leaned her head on his shoulder

Digitized by Google

and looked up at him. He spoke to her, and she smiled at him.

"My good husband! my dear child!" said the woman at the window, softly.

"And so must it be," added Auntie. "That is peace in the house, and peace is happiness. It has always been so here."

Digitized by Google

XI.

In the castle, the news of the death of the Countess Stontheim had not caused very much sorrow; the young baroness and Nelly had not known the deceased at all. Nelly had wound wreaths, and sent them with some sympathetic lines to Blanche, and then the three ladies had put on mourning, in order to satisfy outward form—chiefly on Blanche's account, who, from Army's letter, was expected at Derenberg for a long stay. Army and her father were to accompany her.

The old baroness was in quite an elevated frame of mind; her large eyes sparkled with new life, and daughter-in-law and grand-daughter could scarcely remember to have seen the old lady so talkative, so sympathetic, and so lovable. So to-day she sat in her room; a small fire burned in the fireplace, and filled the cool, lofty room with a pleasant warmth. She had leaned back in the arm-chair, and her eyes followed old Sanna, who was busy dusting the many frail ornaments on the dainty writing-table with a feather duster. Occasionally she glanced at a letter which she held in her hand, and then watched the old servant closely. The latter had just taken hold of one of the red silk curtains which hung behind the writing-desk, in order to arrange it in proper folds, and smoothed it down with her fingers, when suddenly there was a peculiar splitting sound. "Oh, *cielo!*" cried the old woman, and showed

Digitized by Google

her mistress the long tear which had been made in the rotten silk. "*O mi dispiace!*" added she, frightened.

She knew her mistress on such occasions, and awaited a sharp reproof for her carelessness, but to-day she laughed, and said: "What is it? Bah! the silk is rotten; it must soon be renewed. Look at the carpet, Sanna, how faded the red is! I will send for some samples from B—— soon—naturally, red again—this warm color is the most beautiful."

The old woman looked at her joyously. "Oh, signora!" said she, flatteringly, "I shall die of joy if you once more have everything beautiful as formerly, even on account of the arrogant people, who think they can say everything that they think to our face, because we are poor. I will be glad."

"Oh, *cielo*, Sanna, *titto, titto!*" cried the old lady, and quickly made a gesture of aversion; "it is perfectly indifferent to me what they say. You know I do not like to hear the conversation of common people about me. Let them do what they will; that is the fourth time since yesterday that you have wished to unburden your heart to me over gossip which probably originated in the mill." Then she took up the letter again and became absorbed in the few lines, and a proud expression was on her delicate mouth.

"Blanche is composed and calmer than I had expected, dear grandmamma," she read. "It is strange what a strong mind dwells in this little girl's body; she arranges everything with a foresight and wisdom which I must admire, even if I were not the man wholly in love that I am. Immediately after the opening of the will, at which, naturally, Blanche's father will be present, and after the necessary decisions are made,

Digitized by Google

Blanche comes to Derenberg. The wedding remains fixed for the old date—at least, Blanche did not refuse when I made her this proposal, although she did not assent very joyfully, which is scarcely to be expected, however, in the present circumstances. How will it then be, dear grandmamma? I hope that Blanche will yet be persuaded to live in my dear old Derenberg; my heart swells at the thought. Well, we will see. It seems to me that this death has made a deep impression on her; she is quieter and more calm now—sometimes too quiet; so that I am anxious, and ask whether it is really only deep grief which has this effect upon her."

"Very good!" whispered the old lady; "and I will make use of this mood. It must be strange if now, when my chief enemy is gone, my will is not carried out. It cannot possibly be hard, although the future Mrs. von Derenberg possesses quite a cultivated, defiant little head. Oh, *dio mio*, when she once feels my hand over her, and is Army's wife, then she shall learn to modestly yield her own will. Sanna!" cried she, then, in an undertone, as if she just remembered the presence of her maid, but the old woman had vanished from the room.

The baroness rose from her comfortable position. "The first thing that I do, as soon as the wedding is over, will be to come to an understanding of affairs, and work myself into the state of things under its guidance; but not Hellwig—Hellwig never comes into the house again to me. Then, to apparently let Blanche have her way—the laws are made so wisely in this country that a wife counts for as good as nothing; the husband alone acts. Whether she is satisfied with that

Digitized by Google

or not is, at least before the courts, quite indifferent—she must submit."

She rose, and walked to the window. "It is highest time," she continued, in her soliloquy, "to restore this wilderness of overgrown thicket, shattered, empty pedestals, neglected lawns——" She stood there for a long time, and before her eyes the picture began gradually to change; again the dark-green velvet lawn spread out, again white marble statues shone through the groups of trees, and above her the old banner of the Derenbergs floated in the breeze; and, as formerly, brilliant equipages drove through the grounds, and happy guests again filled the decorated rooms; the master of the house descended the broad steps, and before him glided the dainty form of his young wife, with her bright red hair. Yes, she was beautiful. When had a Derenberg ever had a homely wife at his side?

So she dreamed—the old lady at the window of the desolate castle—and a dazzling future rose in joyous imagination; she would once more be wealthy and happy.

And now the day on which they expected the betrothed pair; and the Colonel, who was to accompany them, had come. The windows were wide open in Blanche's room, and the fresh autumn air blew into the luxuriant, comfortable rooms; the sunbeams sparkled on the pale-green shining satin folds of the walls and the puffy upholstering. Everywhere were fresh autumn flowers in vases and baskets; and Nelly looked carefully around to see that the petted child should miss nothing. In her simple black woollen gown she looked, in this radiant boudoir, almost like a poor, enchanted princess, who, through chance or a good spirit, had

Digitized by Google

again been placed in the splendid surroundings which really belonged to her. The oval face, with the delicate, rosy complexion, stood out charmingly from the deep black of her gown, and the white hands which peeped out from the crape cuffs were almost too small for a grown girl.

"It certainly is charming, this room, grandmamma," said she, and glanced at the old baroness, who just then appeared in the frame of the door.

"Certainly! But for you, *mio cuore*, I would find it prettier in blue."

"Oh, for me!" she laughed. "Dear grandmamma, such a room of silk and lace and I! I should feel unhappy in this perfume and shine."

"You will learn to be happy in it, my child."

The young girl glanced up quickly; that sounded so serious.

"If my little Nelly is very good," continued the old lady, and came nearer to the astonished girl, "and tries to restrain her wild manners, then perhaps I will give her such a charming room for a Christmas present."

"Grandmamma, you!" cried the girl, incredulously. "Ah, no; I would rather have furniture such as Lieschen has, with blue-and-white flowered cretonne—it looks beautiful."

The old baroness shrugged her shoulders and turned round, for her daughter-in-law entered.

"Here I have just received a package of dress materials and patterns," said she. "Did you order them, mamma? I think it must be a mistake; there is silk furniture covering, and all sorts of things which we cannot possibly use."

"I ordered them, Cornelia," declared the one ad-

Digitized by Google

dressed impatiently. "Have the things taken to my room."

Nelly flew away to attend to it, and the two women stood silently opposite each other.

"But, dear mamma," said the younger, at length, "why did you do that?"

"Have you looked in the glass, Cornelia?" was the sharp answer. "You can scarcely show yourself in

that garb before our people, let alone at the wedding." She laughed.

"I had already bought a white dress for Nelly, and for me a black silk."

"Dearest Cornelia, the thinnest of silks—circus rider

Digitized by Google

silk, as they say—I know it," replied the old lady, scornfully. "Enough; it remains settled that I buy what I think necessary——"

"But, mamma!"

"You perhaps wish to ask where I will get the money? Well, then, Cornelia, the tradespeople have earned thousands from me formerly, and the Baroness Derenberg can still get credit. For the present, that is enough; for the rest, let me care. Or do you perhaps wish that your son should be married in a perfectly empty drawing-room, where the curtains will scarcely hang to the poles, because they are moth-eaten. The furniture coverings have holes as large as that dish there? Your daughter-in-law would turn up her nose—do you not think so also?"

"Oh, I had not thought of that," replied the pale woman gently, and closed the door, as a cool breeze blew the silken curtains far into the room. "I only thought," she added, returning, and standing before the splendid upright piano which Blanche had had sent her during the summer, because, she said, she could not play on the old piano in the sitting-room—"I thought because we are so wholly alone, and in the family——"

"There we have again your perfectly unbearable views, Cornelia. Army is no peasant, who celebrates his wedding where he accidentally meets his girl; he is the son of one of the oldest families in the country, and his bride a relative of our house; and therefore I will take care that this ceremony at least takes place in a suitable manner. It would make a tiger of a lamb, Cornelia, the way you think of such things."

The old lady walked past her daughter-in-law, and, with deeply flushed face, went to the window.

Digitized by Google

"I must, above all things, urgently request, Cornelia," she continued, "that you somewhat modify your plebeian views when Blanche is in the house. They are the means best suited to thoroughly embitter her stay here; she can bear the eternal anxious watching and saving which measures out the butter for every roll as little as I; and now, before all things, it is necessary to keep her fast here—fast, at every price. When once the Amen is spoken to the marriage service, then we are out of all difficulty."

A deep blush had risen to the cheeks of the daughter-in-law, and tears came to her eyes. For whom did she save? For whom did she care? Why did she wear the poorest clothes? So that that eccentric woman yonder might feel as little as possible the really oppressive poverty, and should to a certain extent live as formerly. Every evening she sent Sanna up to her room with tea and cold meat, and Nelly and she contented themselves with a soup, or simple bread and butter.

"Now you will probably weep again, Cornelia," again said the voice which spoke the German so sharply and awkwardly, while it seemed to fairly melt in melodious softness in its mother tongue. "*Misericordia!* what sentimental creatures German women are! It makes me beside myself when I see these tears spring forth at once. What I have just said to you is only for our good—if you only would see it!"

At this moment Nelly entered again. "It is five o'clock already, mamma, and we can expect them by six. The table is set downstairs, and Henry will make a fire here quickly, and close the windows. I am so curious," she continued, "to hear what they will tell us, to see how Blanche looks in mourning, and learn

Digitized by Google

how the will read." At these words she looked at her mother and saw the tears in her eyes. "Do not cry,

mamma," whispered she. "Army is coming—our dear Army!"

"The will?" asked the grandmother; "*mon Dieu*, Army half, she half, and different legacies to old servants, hospitals, etc.; and probably also to the colonel, who surely looked out for himself."

"Yes, grandmamma dear; but don't you remember that at that time Army said that Blanche was everywhere considered the sole heiress——"

"Ah, bah! but then it is all the same—the husband

Digitized by Google

always decides over the wife's property—but I do not believe it; the Stontheim loved Army far too dearly."

"But if the will was made before, grandmamma?"

"Then she has surely added a codicil," replied the old lady impatiently.

"If I only knew exactly when they will come!" said Nelly. "Patience, patience! Will I ever learn that?" She laughed at herself. "Only see what a beautiful sunset, mamma. Now it will soon be dark. I look forward so much to seeing Army."

Gradually darkness fell over castle and park, and star after star shone from the heavens in sparkling glory; the lamp was not yet lighted in the cosy sitting-room; only the fire on the hearth threw a soft light into the room. The young girl there in the deep window recess looked up into the brilliant sky with great dreamy eyes; she knelt near her mother's chair, and had put her arm round her. The deeply moved woman pressed a handkerchief to her eyes, and her breast rose and fell in soft weeping.

"My dear little mother," pleaded the girl, in a sweet voice, "do not cry your dear eyes red! What will Army think when he comes? See, grandmamma did not mean it so badly——"

"Ah, Nelly, that is not it," replied the weeping woman softly. "The whole day a fear, an uneasiness which I can scarcely describe, has followed me. God grant that nothing has happened to the boy!"

"But, mamma," consoled her daughter, and leaned her blonde head on her mother's breast, "what could have happened to him? He is surely driving over in the old yellow post-chaise, and sitting opposite his Blanche, therefore in the most comfortable situation

Digitized by Google

which there can be for him. The Colonel is telling anecdotes, and they are all looking forward to a warm supper, and to seeing your dear, friendly face, my little mother."

At this moment the woman in the arm-chair started up. "What is the matter, mamma?" asked Nelly anxiously.

"It seemed to me that I heard his step," whispered the mother. "Did it not seem so to you, Nelly?"

"No, mamma; and, indeed, it is not possible."

All was quiet in the large room; the whispers ceased; there was no sound but the crackling of the fire on the hearth, the soft, quick ticking of the old clock, and occasionally the apprehensive sigh of the mother-heart, which trembled with foreboding suffering.

And then—then—yes, that was his step in the corridor. "Nelly," cried the baroness, with half-suffocated voice, and the young girl started up and hurried through the room; and then the door opened—a tall figure entered.

"Army!" rejoiced his sister; "Army!" came also from the lips of the mother; "Army, is it you?"

"Yes, mamma," replied he, but his voice sounded constrained, as if he must force himself to appear calm.

"My dear, good boy," said the mother tenderly, and put her arm round him. "Army, dear Army," coaxed Nelly; "but please say—where, then, is Blanche?"

He stood near the fireplace, still in cap and overcoat, and the soft reflection of the dying fire did not let his features be distinguished; but at this question it seemed as if a tremor ran over his form.

"Army, where is your betrothed?" now cried the mother.

Digitized by Google

"I have none, mamma!" His voice almost broke in deep, intense pain. Nelly gave a cry of fright; but the mother had no answer. This was the misfortune which she had suspected. She pressed her son's hand tighter in hers, as if she would rouse him from a fearful dream.

"Do not make me weak, mamma!" he implored, and slowly drew her to the nearest chair. "It is of no use; how could I even imagine"—he laughed bitterly—"that she——Get a light, Nelly!" said he, then, shortly and

roughly, "and prepare grandmamma. I have not much time. I must leave again to-morrow."

With trembling hands Nelly seized the lamp. The bright light fell upon Army's pale face, he still stood

Digitized by Google

on the same spot, and, as if out of his mind, seemed to stare into vacancy.

"Army, my dear Army!" whispered his sister, and, sobbing, put her arms round him. He absently stroked her hair. "What is it, Nelly?"

"Please come; let me take off your coat," pleaded she, and drew the heavy garment from his shoulders.

"Grandmamma!" cried she, then, and ran to meet the old lady.

"Army," said she, hastily entering, "what does this mean? I would not believe it when Sanna asserted she had met you in the corridor. Where is Blanche? Where is the Colonel? What does it mean that you alone——"

"It means," replied he, slowly, emphasizing each syllable, "that my betrothed, early this morning, shortly before our departure, gave me my dismissal; she does not love me, she sent word to me, as reason for her sudden resolution, and, God knows, the reason is sufficient!" Again he laughed scornfully. The old lady started back as if struck by lightning.

"It is not possible!" stammered she, deathly pale.

"I said so myself this morning, when the Colonel made me this announcement," continued the young man, "and I have clutched my forehead a hundred times, and asked myself whether I am mad, or something similar. But no; it is a fact; Blanche von Derenberg is no longer my *fiancée*."

"Army, did nothing go before this, then?" asked his mother, who lay back in her chair as if crushed.

"What went before?" he answered cuttingly. "Oh, well, the opening of the will. Blanche von Derenberg is sole heiress to the great wealth—that is all. Why

Digitized by Google

should she marry a man whom she does not love? But calm yourself, grandmamma——" He came a step nearer to the tottering woman, who clung with both hands to a chair. "She is certainly a noble character; she suspects that I have incurred debts through my betrothal, and therefore she announced to me, through her father, that she is ready to pay all my debts. That was surely a consolation for the dismissed *fiancé*, for the stupid boy who clung with all his foolish, hot love to this false being!"

He had played with a glass during these words, continually turning it round; now he seized it and hurled it to the floor, so that it crashed, and the pieces flew far and wide over the old parquet.

"Army!" came anxiously from his mother's lips, and her trembling hands were stretched out to her son. But the old baroness had drawn herself up. "We cannot be satisfied with that," said she violently. "Blanche surely inherits on the condition that you become her husband. I still have a letter from the Stontheim——"

"Do you think, then," asked the young officer, and with a couple of strides stood before his grandmother—"do you think, then, that I would ever look at her again? She might lie on her knees before me, and implore me. I would push her away, and if I were starving, and you all with me, not a penny would I take from her favor; rather a ball through my head. Yes, indeed, a ball, which finally is the most sensible thing; it also helped my father, as Blanche told me, when I once begged her urgently to live with me here in Derenberg; she was afraid, she declared, in this mysterious nest, where the last owner had taken his

Digitized by Google

own life—ha, ha! Fine reasons, against which no sensible man could urge anything!" His voice sounded hoarse, and almost insane, and the dark eyes shone from his distorted face in consuming anguish.

"Mamma! mamma!" cried the young girl heart-brokenly; "Army is ill; he does not know what he is saying!"

The pale woman rose from the arm-chair, walked over to her son, and seized his hand; she wished to speak, but her lips moved without uttering a sound. Her eyes looked at him so pained and pleadingly, as if they would say, "Spare me! Have I not suffered enough in life?" He did not see them, the supplicating glance; quite impatiently, he tried to free his hand from hers. "There, there, mamma; never mind. I do not think of dying; I will live—for you; I am so young, said the Colonel; my whole life is yet before me. I am your natural support, as far as a bankrupt nobleman and indebted officer can be; besides, here is a letter from the Colonel to Baroness von Derenberg," he added, taking a letter from his pocket-book and throwing it on the table. "Probably an explanation as to why it is best thus, and so on."

He passed both hands through his dark hair and walked to the window; then he strode firmly and quickly through the room, and went out.

For a few moments there was silence; what had just happened laid a spell on all present. Nelly's tears were restrained; she held both arms round her mother, who stood so strangely still in the middle of the room, and seemed not to notice the anxious girl's caresses at all. The old baroness had gone up to the table, and the fine paper of the opened letter crackled softly in the

Digitized by Google

trembling hands. Suddenly she laughed—a loud, mocking laugh.

"See here, Cornelia! There it stands," cried she. "What did I tell you to-day? 'Another reason for the request of my daughter of your grandson,'" she read, "'to give her back her liberty, is that she was not pleased with the Derenberg circumstances—the why? Spare me; why should we say bitter things to each other, when we are about to break off all relations for the rest of our lives——' Do you see," she interrupted herself violently, "that is the consequence of your, of Nelly's, actions to the petted girl. Instead of subordinating yourselves, instead of having consideration for her caprices, spoiling her a little, you, Cornelia, never laid aside the mask of a suffering martyr, and were tediousness in person; and Miss Nelly, she put on her most unbearable mood, and played the mentor to every innocent caprice which she had. Now you have the result," cried she, in a voice trembling with rage. "Army may thank you, you alone, for the downfall of all his hopes. Oh, it is enough to make one's hair stand on end, to be chained to so much tiresome thinking and sensibility; so many simple, stupid views—the misfortune of my life!"

The old lady had clinched her delicate hands, and looked at mother and daughter with an expression of indescribable scorn.

"Grandmamma, you have a right to scold me"—the young girl freed herself from her mother and stepped protectingly before her—"but leave mamma out of the game. Pardon that I venture to speak so to you; I cannot help it; a hundred times already it has enraged me to hear you accuse mamma so harshly. This after-

Digitized by Google

noon I saw her weep at your unjust reproofs, of which the one just spoken is the most groundless which ever crossed your lips. Mamma was always pleasant to Blanche—more loving than you ever were—and mamma was the only one who took Blanche under her protection when she was hateful and rude. I certainly, I grant

you, did not love my future sister-in-law, because I instinctively felt that she had only engaged herself to Army from constraint, only because of aunt's wish; because she saw in him the means of retaining aunt's favor and money. Had she foreseen how it would happen she would not have let him persuade her, and still

Digitized by Google

less would she have wasted a couple of precious weeks of her life here with us. And I say it is fortunate that it has come about so, and Army can thank God on his knees that aunt's death occurred before the wedding; and therefore, grandmamma, I beg you to leave mamma in peace, and do not make her ill by your undeserved reproaches—reproaches which she has not deserved on account of this false, heartless creature, who even slandered our father in his grave, and accused him of suicide—— Merciful God!" she interrupted herself, and her voice, which at the last words had been almost suffocated by sobs, now sounded, from fright, like a scream; and she had already sunk down upon the floor beside her mother, and tried to restore the unconscious woman to consciousness again.

"Oh, *cielo*, *cielo!*" murmured the old lady; "what a life—what a fearful life!"

It had long ago struck midnight, and still Nelly sat at the bedside of her feverish mother. She was the only one who held up her head at the fearful change of affairs. She had put her unconscious, exhausted mother to bed, and as much as possible removed the traces of the preparations which yesterday evening had been made to receive the daughter-in-law, and bride of the only son. She had wept softly through the long corridor, and listened at the door of Army's room; the steps of the restless wanderer up and down had consoled her. And now she sat quietly again, and watched the uneasy slumber, and occasionally she breathed a kiss upon the fine hands which were folded so tightly against the quickly heaving breast. The gray dawn of the new day broke through the curtains and gradually took on a rosy hue.

Digitized by Google

Nelly went to the window. Down below lay the park; the leaves of the trees lay, wet and heavy, on the ground covered with hoar frost; the red-browns of the maples stood out from among the autumnal yellow leaves, and a fine, white mist, which hung in the tops of the tall trees of the park—like a light, transparent veil, tinged rosily by the rising sun—lay over the woods. Weary and worn, the young girl leaned her head against the panes and closed her eyes; then she heard a noise behind her, and the pushing back of a chair.

"Mamma!" cried she, as she saw her mother, with feverish haste, putting on one article of clothing after another.

"I have slept so long, Nelly, and have not once consoled Army. It is already morning. No, let me; I must go to him; he shall not wholly lose his belief in humanity; he is still much too young for that. Do not hold me back, Nelly. He will not sleep; it is not easy to sleep after such grief." She scarcely suffered her daughter to put a shawl round her, and hurried out through the sitting-room.

The girl did not venture to follow her; her mother's face had looked so grave, the eyes so worn with great inward misery. She crept to the adjoining door; then suddenly a piercing scream. Hastily she rushed out, and flew through the long corridor. The door of her brother's room was open; there stood her mother, and tremblingly clung to a table.

The young girl's frightened eyes in a moment glanced around the large room: there was the old canopy bedstead, the pillows tumbled; on the table, a half-emptied bottle of wine, near it a glass; over the

Digitized by Google

sofa the bare wall—the large picture which had hung there stood with its face to the wall; there lay the epaulettes near the sword on a chair; but Army—where was Army?

"He is gone!" stammered the pale lips of the trembling woman; "he is gone, Nelly. If he—if he—like his father——"

"What then, mamma? What, for heaven's sake?"

"If he, Nelly—if he—— Oh, I—merciful Heaven!" she said, as if out of her mind. "Hurry, Nelly; look for him!" she implored, hastily. "I cannot; tell him he must stay with me. I have lived through that fearful experience once—that is enough; a second time I cannot bear."

"Mamma," implored the girl, in deathly anguish, "what do you mean?"

"Quick! quick! So, go, but hurry! He shall not die; he shall live. Go, or else they will bring him also to me, so pale and bloody——" She shuddered, and pointed to the door.

The terrified child understood what her mother wished, and, as with eagle's claws, fear seized her heart. She flew from the room; where—where should she look first? Mechanically she ran down the stairs. The tower door was ajar; in wild haste she flew over the castle place, past the stone bears, into the linden walk. Her brother's desperate manner, the fearful insinuation about her father—now a frightful certainty—dawned upon her. She pressed her hand to her breast, and stood motionless. Where could he be?

"Army!" cried she, but it seemed as if the cry would not leave her throat. "Army!" All was deathly quiet around her.

Digitized by Google

The withered leaves lay damp and wet at her feet; a pair of little birds fluttered in the branches, and looked down with curious black eyes at the anxious young child of man. "Army!" she gasped out once more, with the exertion of all her strength, and then a long, echoing call like a jodel—thus had they called each other as children; he must hear that.

But there was not a sound in answer; only a whispering passed through the old linden trees, as if they shook their heads in dissent, in order to say, "He is

not here." "In the pond, perhaps—in the pond," thought she, and when she now hurried through the

Digitized by Google

thick bushes a never known fear of this quiet, this solitude, seized her. What if she did not find him? What if he could no longer hear when she called him? If he, pale and bloody—— Her heart contracted, but she walked on.

There lay the little dark pool, as calmly as if there were no storms, no misery, in the world; pond-lilies and withered leaves floated motionlessly on the smooth surface, and the stone bench on the bank was empty. She sighed with relief, and hastily walked on; the hanging branches struck her in the face, and scattered dew on the blonde hair. The hem of her dress, heavy and wet, dragged behind her; on further, ever further! She looked anxiously to the right and left, and from time to time she called her brother's name in the cool morning air. Then—steps! As if hunted, she flew on; there lay the barred gate, one side opened. She hurried through; it was a workman, who, removing his cap, walked past her, gazing at the unexpected apparition in astonishment; then he stopped, she had made a gesture as if she wished to say something, but as she was silent, the man asked:

"Are you looking for anything, miss?"

"Oh, no, no; I only wished to take a walk with my brother. Have you, perhaps, seen him?"

"The officer young gentleman, do you mean? Yes; I met him a little ways behind the rag-mill."

"Thanks!" she gasped, and took the path to the mill. She walked on with the greatest haste. There the dwelling-house already shone through the elms; there lay the mill bridge. On, on! They all were surely sleeping in the house. But, further! There—merciful God!—there rang out a shot; it sounded so plainly, so

Digitized by Google

fearfully! Mechanically seeking a support, she threw her arm round the nearest tree, then she slid to the ground. She did not see that an old woman ran over the mill bridge as fast as her feet permitted her; how a good, honest face, framed by a white cap, bent over her so anxiously; she did not hear the cry for help which came from the frightened lips: "Mercy, Nelly—our Nelly! What has happened up there again?"

Digitized by Google

XII.

The dark curtains were drawn in the castle sitting-room, and there, where usually the large, old-fashioned sofa stood, was now Nelly's mother's sick-bed. She had been taken very ill on that unhappy morning when she had sought her son and not found him; her weak life fought desperately with the dark angel, whose presence, announcing misery, seemed to float through the room. Her thoughts travelled in a continuous circle about that day when she had stood beside the stiff, bloody corpse of her husband. Now it was he whom she saw—now it was her son—and, in heart-rending tones, she begged him not to die also; not to leave her; she could not live without him.

Now it was quiet in the large room; a slender, girlish form, which listened timidly each time that the confused, feverish talk came from the lips of the deathly ill woman, now glided, with almost noiseless steps, over the old parquet, smoothed the pillows with gentle hand, and bent over the sufferer to listen for the last breath, if she seemed to be asleep. This was already the tenth day which she had spent watching here, through long, dreadful days and still more dreadful nights. To-day the fever had somewhat lessened, as the physician said; and now sleep had come for the exhausted, sick woman. The young girl took a book from the table, and seated herself by the window,

Digitized by Google

through whose curtains fell a narrow ray of light. The invalid's breath came regularly and deeply; there was

something wearying, lulling, in the twilit room, and she was worn out from night watching; but she would not sleep, not at any price; she leaned her little head back against the chair cushion, and closed her eyes. But how strange it was that she now sat up here in the castle which she had never thought to enter again. Auntie had awakened her stormily one morning, and in the sitting-room she found Nelly, who lay on the sofa, her clothes wet with dew, unconscious. How frightened she had been! Hours had passed before they could bring the poor child back to consciousness; but, before it had come so far, then—then the door of the sitting-

Digitized by Google

room of her father's house had opened, and—he stood upon the threshold. She could have cried out in astonishment and fright—yes, fright, for he had entered with an expression of the deepest misery; his eyes rested upon her so entirely without expression; he was no longer the Army of former days, no longer the gay, ambitious Army, with the proud, handsome features.

"Is not my sister here?" he had asked dully; and then, when he discovered her, saw her lie there, pale and unconscious, something like deep compassion had come over his face.

What else had happened? Auntie and he had whispered softly together, but for Lieschen only these words had been audible—his mother was very ill, he needed help. Sanna was so awkward, and grandmamma complained of headache; and now Nelly also—poor Nelly!

"I will go," had Lieschen then declared. And, near him, she had walked, in deep silence, through the autumnal, quiet nature. He did not say a word to her at that time, and until to-day not a word had passed his lips, however often he softly entered the sick-room and drew back the curtains of the bed to look at his mother.

And Lieschen knew why he was so gloomy, so taciturn. The sparkling engagement-ring was missing from his finger, and the sick woman's delirium had betrayed the unfortunate event so plainly. Oh, this beautiful, false creature! How Lieschen hated the faithless one! How right Nelly had been at that time when she said, "She does not love him." But he—if she could only say a few consoling words to him!

Then the door of the sick-room opened softly and Nelly entered. The young girl still looked pale and

Digitized by Google

miserable. The excitement of that fearful hour when she had sought her brother with deadly fear had not passed over her without leaving its traces—had made it impossible for her to devote herself to the wearing care of the invalid. Now a light of hearty thankfulness lay on her face, as she, after a glance at the sleeper, approached Lieschen, who watched her pleasantly.

"How nicely she is sleeping!" whispered she, and seated herself upon a stool at her friend's feet. "Thank God! The physician thinks the danger is now past. Ah, Lieschen, how happy I am in this hope! I feel strong again now; and you shall sleep this night, you good heart!"

"No, you shall, Nelly; no contradiction," said Lieschen firmly. "The physician will not hear of your watching, under any consideration. Afterwards you shall put on a shawl, and go out in the open air for a little. Your brother will surely like to accompany you."

Nelly shook her head sadly. "Oh, yes, he will come with me; but, Lieschen, you do not know how terrible it is to be alone with him! He walks gloomily beside me, and then suddenly he begins to whistle gayly; and if I look at him, questioningly and in astonishment, he says, 'It is gallows humor, little one; do not notice it!' Recently he told me that he should leave as soon as mamma was a little better; he could not endure this solitude."

"Cannot your grandmamma calm and console him, then?" asked Lieschen.

"Grandmamma?" The young girl's lips trembled with anger. "She is angry with Army, with mamma, and me; with God, and the whole world. She locks herself

Digitized by Google

into her room, and when she has inquired, through Sanna, *pro forma*, how we are, she thinks she has done enough. If it were not for you and Auntie, and if your good mother did not care for us, things would look badly up here."

"Nelly!" whispered the young girl, blushing, and laid her hand on her friend's mouth.

The old baroness sat moodily in her room. "It must come some time," said she, half aloud. "I must speak with him; what is to be done now?" She rose, and rang the bell. "I request my grandson to come to me," she commanded the entering Sanna, shortly and unpleasantly, and took her seat again.

Through the red curtains only a half light stole into the room, for outside the sky was overcast, and a sharp autumn wind had begun to forcibly strip the leaves from the trees; in the fireplace a wood fire flamed, and threw bright rays upon the red upholstering and hangings; the faded colors shone in almost their former crimson splendor when such a flickering light fell upon them. The baroness gazed gloomily into the quivering flames.

"Come in!" cried she, as a hasty knock was heard at the door.

"I was about to request a short interview, grandmamma," began Army, entering, after a bow, and stood behind the chair to which the old lady motioned him with a wave of her hand. "Mamma is better. As soon as she has had her first conscious moment, and seen me and recognized me, I will leave; until then I wait, so that she may give up the unfortunate fancy that I have taken my life." During these words he looked as indifferent as if he spoke of a stranger.

Digitized by Google

The old lady shrugged her shoulders. "It is wholly your mother's manner of making every evil worse by her nervousness—ridiculous ideas—and the girl confirms her in them."

"I think when one has once had such a sad experience," said he, with sharp emphasis, "it is easily pardoned if, in such moments, fear of a repetition overpowers a delicate woman; and as for nervousness, it is no wonder—the life which she has led up to this time would have brought even stronger natures as far. I look upon it as a reproof," he continued, "that she became ill on my account. Could I have suspected that her mother's heart would drive her to me so early, I would not have gone out to master my painful thoughts in the open air."

"Sentimental ideas and no end!" remarked the old baroness irritably. "You are just so; you are all the same, you Germans. You look at the moon, and sigh and worry yourselves more than such an affair is finally worth. But, to business! Can you remain in the service?"

He looked gloomily at the floor. "I do not know," said he; "at present it depends upon the mood of my creditors. Truly, as soon as the news of my broken engagement is spread, they will rush upon me like a pack of hunting dogs. The affair will come up before the regiment; the colonel will say, 'Pay or not?' and then——" He turned round with a hasty gesture, as if he longed to end the conversation.

The old lady listened to him as calmly as if he spoke of a pleasure party.

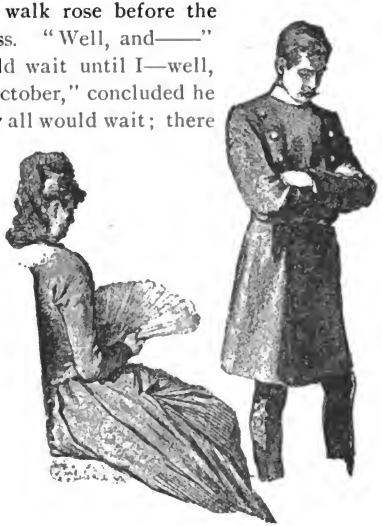
"Hellwig must advise us," said she, resolved.

"Hellwig? Yes; if he could procure money! Only

Digitized by Google

recently he confessed the impossibility of getting me two hundred dollars, a sum which I must pay the carriage-maker at a fixed date."

The dainty little landau which had arrived one day from the capital soon after Blanche had declared that she did not like to walk rose before the eyes of the baroness. "Well, and——"



"The man would wait until I—well, until the end of October," concluded he shortly. "Oh, they all would wait; there was no hurry at all—no indeed! I was Aunt Stontheim's nephew, and about to marry her niece——"

"To how much do all your debts amount?" asked the grandmother.

He made a gesture of distaste. "Why that? They cannot be paid!"

A long pause ensued. Army gazed at one of the Italian landscapes in the gilt frames with apparent interest. Without, the wind had risen to violence; it howled through the chimney, and blew sparks out upon the faded carpet and the black woollen dress of the old lady.

"Army, there is but one way of saving yourself and us."

He turned slowly round, and looked at her interrogatively.

Digitized by Google

"It sounds strangely, perhaps, but in necessity the drowning man clutches at a straw. I mean, you must try, as soon as possible, to make another rich marriage."

"How, grandmamma?" he asked.

"There are enough girls—wealthy, pretty girls—who will buy a husband, as they say——"

"Ah, indeed! I understand," replied he carelessly.

"Consider, Army! It is not a question of your existence alone; it is a question of us all."

"Have you anything else to tell me?" he asked, in a tone which silenced the old lady. "Nothing? Then permit me to take my leave. I should like to see how things are downstairs." He bowed and went.

Quite mechanically, he directed his steps toward the sick-room. He remained standing in the ante-room; it seemed to him that he heard whispering within; then he walked to the window, and pressed his forehead against the panes.

What his grandmother had just said to him fell like scorching drops upon the fresh wound; the pain drove the blood to his cheeks. Before his eyes perpetually floated an alluring, seductive picture, which would not leave him, although he tried a thousand times to banish it. He saw her again as she had appeared to him on the day after the opening of the will, when all was so quiet, so lonely, in the splendid villa. The crowd of callers had gone, the Colonel was dozing after his dinner, in the adjoining room, and he was alone with her—for the first time in a long while. How beautiful she was in the deep black mourning dress, trimmed with crape, the golden flood of her hair held back by black bands! She lay there dreamily in the chair, while he spoke to her of his love, of his longing to possess her,

Digitized by Google

of all the rapture which filled his heart. But did she hear him at all? The glance which she gave him when he took her hand had gone to his heart like cold steel, had conjured up the first frightful suspicion in him. In the course of the conversation, she had suddenly risen and gone out, stammering a trifling excuse. He saw her disappear behind the portières; her wonderful hair shone once more as the curtain rose and fell in the draught from the opened door; then he was alone with his overflowing, sad heart.

She had never loved him, she sent him word; she had only engaged herself to him at her aunt's wish. And yet those yellow falling leaves in the linden alley out there had heard her swear fidelity to him; how she assured him a thousand times that she loved him—loved him more than everything else in the world; had seen her in his arms, and counted her kisses in that warm, sultry summer night; and now—now it had gone so far that no outlet remained for him but to sell himself, as grandmamma advised him—no; rather a ball—a ball! He thought of his mother. No, it would be a sin against her! He now understood, for the first time, what she had suffered, what nameless grief had saddened her life. His father shot himself—why? What had Blanche said? Because he grew melancholy in the desolate home! For that? Scarcely credible; perhaps the bankrupt condition of his estate? That was more probable—and still it is always cowardly to go out of the world and leave wife and children unprotected.

In truth, he—his mother, his little sister, who had almost died with terror about him—he could not, he dare not, leave them, even if he did not understand in what manner he could be their support. Grandmamma,

Digitized by Google

indeed, was not at all embarrassed as to the way of rescue; and, from his officer life, he knew that many a one had saved himself in the last moment by such means. He knew many comrades whom a wealthy marriage had preserved from the most desperate situations, but it always made a sad impression upon him.

He shuddered. What awaited him? They would fall upon him like a pack of wild beasts, he had told his grandmother previously; it was only too certain, he had lived foolishly of late! A bitter smile came to his face; the thought of his celebration of his betrothal among his comrades—the champagne had flowed in streams to all the hurrahs and enthusiastic toasts to the beautiful bride. What could he do when a little game was arranged? They were his guests, these gambling gentlemen—he could not draw back. He lost, and lost. "Fortune in love!" some one had called to him. That had been like fire to his already heated blood. He played on, as if it were necessary to test the truth of the old proverb, and lost—yes, he lost much and gladly on that evening, but what did that signify in comparison with the beautiful winnings which had fallen to him?

He groaned, and clinched his teeth. Where was the happiness in which he had so proudly believed? The old proverb occurred to him: "Trust God for aye! Luck comes each day!" Laughable, how quickly it had left him!

Then a light step was heard behind him. He turned; a face covered with blushes looked at him. "Your mother is asking for you, lieutenant," said a clear voice softly. He walked past Lieschen into the sick-room, and she went to the window, where he had stood

Digitized by Google

until then. Outdoors a fine rain was falling, and wrapped the country in a damp veil; she looked down at her parents' house, but she could not perceive it in the vaporous atmosphere. "What are they doing down there now—my mother, father, and Auntie? Father is probably hunting? Oh, no, he has so much work to do in the office since Mr. Selldorf left so suddenly." Again a deep flush rose to her cheeks.

At first it had been quiet near by; the door was ajar. Army probably knelt at the bed of his sick mother, and now his voice was heard. "My dear, good little mamma, you thought I would do as Baron von Streit-

witz? Oh, no, no; I still have you and Nelly." It sounded so gentle, so consoling, and still as if suppressed tears made the words indistinct. And then the

Digitized by Google

mother's weak voice: Lieschen could not understand the words, but in the tone of the disconnected sounds was a sweet comforting, a happy thanks that she held her son in her arms, the whole, boundless fulness of mother love, which would help, support, advise; so calming, so appeasing, as if a sick child were to be lulled to sleep.

And then, all at once—was it really possible? That sounded like weeping, powerfully suppressed sobs. Was Army——? The young girl suddenly turned, and listened, with paling face. Do men cry also? She hurried to the door; she wished to flee; he must not know that she had heard him. Then he came out of his mother's room, his face grave, and his lips pressed together, but his eyes—yes, they were still moist with the tears which he had shed—for his lost bride.

She stood close before him, her hands folded over her breast, as if she would beg forgiveness for having seen him. He stopped, he glanced at her, and read the tender pity in her eyes. Did the recollection of the times when the little girl had so often charmingly consoled the wild boy, when, in childish play, he lost patience, and in his defiant, boyish rage had shed hot tears, come back to him? "Lieschen," said he gently and thankfully, and gave her his hand. "Army, dear Army," came the answer back, half suffocated by sobs. For a moment he felt a little hand in his, then she was gone.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

XIII.

THE monotonous, quiet life had returned again to Castle Derenberg; still more quiet, even, than formerly, for care, which had already begun to flee before the rosy beams of a beginning happiness, was more faithful than that, and had returned with double gloom. Its mysterious nearness made the old rooms an oppressive residence, and the hearts of the solitary women beat more and more apprehensively.

Army had gone, and the mother had long gazed after her darling's tall form, from whose face the harsh disappointment of his love had frightened away all happiness. There was now something so indifferent, apathetic, in his manner, which made her bitterly anxious about him. Would he not, in order to forget, find pleasure in a wild, dissolute life? "God protect him!" she prayed, and pressed her hands to her breast in nameless anxiety. And when she was thus sunk in her misery, the other cares came after this grief in a long row. How would it be if his debts were not paid? How if Hellwig's exertions had no result? If the old man did not succeed in finding assistance, an outlet? He had looked so doubtful, had shrugged his shoulders so uneasily when the old baroness had cried out to him, half imperiously, half pleadingly, "You must, Hellwig—you must! Only get money for a short time, only

Digitized by Google

so that ruin does not burst over my grandson! The rest will be arranged afterwards; with time comes advice." And the old man had promised, with a heavy heart, to try "to help that unfortunate fellow, Army, out of his difficulty," and at the same time had inquired how, then, the baroness thought to arrange the "afterwards." And as she had then, in her nervous manner, given the faithful representative of her family some hints by which she hoped to find a rescue, he had smiled almost sadly, and a questioning, "The dangerous experiment for the second time?" had come from his lips. "God grant," he added, "that it turns out better this time. Besides, baroness, it is no longer so easy to-day as you think. The world has become unpleasantly practical of late. Fathers who will receive such a noble young wild oats with open arms, and count it an honor to pay his colossal debts, grow more and more scarce. Money is tight, baroness—very tight; but who advised—— The devil! the foolishness of purchasing equipages and silken furniture for the mademoiselle *fiancée?* That was far too premature. One should not sell the bear skin before one is sure of the bear. You, baroness, who have experienced so much in this life, should have taken the boy by the ear and taught him *mores;* he has been far too easily led."

The eyes of the younger baroness had rested reproachfully on her mother-in-law—those anxious, pleading eyes in the pale, grief-stricken face, which, scarcely recovered from illness, seemed doubly small and transparent; but they had so far influenced the old man that he at least promised to do his best; and then, when the mother-in-law had gone, he spoke a few hearty words of comfort to the pale woman, who had been

Digitized by Google

unhappy from her childhood, and whose quiet, suffering manner had so wholly won his heart.

Lieschen had long ago returned to her home, accom-

panied by the tenderest thanks of Nelly and her mother. No pleasant words, no thankful glance, had come to her from the old lady; her whole surroundings did penance for the misfortune which had come to the house. Even Sanna did not venture to open her mouth unquestioned. Lieschen scarcely noticed that no thanks had come to her from this side for the wearing exertions of the sick-bed. She was too happy that she had been able to do something for Nelly's mother, whom she had

Digitized by Google

always loved so dearly, so honored. Now she came almost daily to the castle, and her happy chat, her bright, pleasant looks, brought a sunbeam for an hour into the quiet, lofty rooms; and then Nelly forgot for a short time her sadness, only to be doubly miserable afterwards.

"How happy she is!" thought she, as her friend's slender figure hurried home so lightly through the linden walk, whose trees were now leafless. She pictured Lieschen's comfortable home—how she put her arm round the stately master of the house, and called him her dear father, of whom she could be so proud—so proud—and then Nelly's eyes overflowed with bitter misery.

So November had come, with its gloomy weather; the storms again howled round the old castle, as they had done for centuries already; the heavy, damp clouds hung over the landscape, and rain, intermingled with snow, beat against the window-panes. Such weather influences human hearts, and especially a sick one, which so much needs enlivenment, and involuntarily the question came to her lips, "Will the sun ever shine again? Will the storms ever cease?" Well for the human heart that this hope is given it even in the days of the greatest pain! It whispers consoling words to the despairing heart, and paints brilliant arabesques upon the stormy heavens, and charming, flowery figures, between which all sorts of happy, ardently desired future images look forth; and the tearful eyes may then look up more confidently, and the timid breast breathes anew. All may yet be well!

And time passed—monotonously, slowly, and the days passed like lead. Each week a letter came from

Digitized by Google

the absent son, which the mother opened with secret fear and heart-beats. Each time she thought to read something dreadful! Nelly greeted it with a slight smile, which vanished behind tears when she saw the short, superficial lines. "Do you not see, mamma, how unhappy he is—so crushed, so different from formerly?" She sighed, and read the letter again and again, behind whose brevity a deeply crushed nature seemed to hide.

"He is well," the old baroness used to say, scornfully; "he hopes that we are also; he is very busy—*voilà tout!* He is no man, or else he would stake everything, so that affairs should not go to extremes. Heavens! were I in his place, life before me, and so young! Oh, this unhappy German sentimentality, which, from mere pain about something lost, cannot find the courage to struggle for a new happiness. *Orribile!* It is the misfortune of us all. I would never have thought that he could be so also!"

And, trembling with excitement, the old lady sat down and wrote a letter to her grandson to encourage him; and another to Hellwig to spur him on to arrange the debts as soon as possible.

November passed and December came, with its storms. They whistled round the tall chimneys, and turned the rusty weather-vanes creaking on the towers; they bent and shook the old trees of the forest. The rain beat as formerly against the windows, and softened the park roads, until, in one sparkling, starry night, winter came with its frost and froze the roads as smooth and hard as a turnpike; it covered the pond with a mirror-clear crust of ice, and spread the first fine-flaked snow over road and path.

"Now it will soon be Christmas," the village people

Digitized by Google

said, and were happy. "Now it will soon be Christmas, mamma," said Nelly also, to the pale woman who sat by the fireplace and knitted; but scarcely any lovely anticipation of the beautiful festival shone in her face. "Will Army come?" she added, questioningly, and throwing her arm round her mother's neck, she begged: Dear mamma, I do not want any presents, if only Army comes."

"Now it will soon be Christmas," said Lieschen joyfully to Auntie, as she saw the brilliant snow covering in the morning. It sounded so heartily glad that the old woman glanced at her face almost surprised. Was not the girl wholly changed since the last weeks? The old teazing gayety which became her so charmingly again shone so winningly from the large blue eyes; her cheeks bloomed as rosily as formerly, and all this since she—yes, since she had returned home from the castle. The old woman had secretly felt so much anxiety about her darling; thought she would return pale and weary; but no, the air of the sick-room seemed to have done her as much good as a trip to a watering-place would have done another. At first she had shaken her head at the wonder; but then the thought had come to the old woman with the overflowing, tender heart, "What if the broken engagement is the cause of this change?" And, in true womanly manner, she had not missed an opportunity of bringing the conversation to that unhappy fact, and thereby watched the young girl sharply. But, however attentively the good, faithful eyes of the old woman watched, they could discern nothing particular. Lieschen pitied with all her heart the deceived man, and joined in animatedly when Auntie blamed the faithless bride; even discussed with her whether it might

Digitized by Google

yet be possible that she might perceive her injustice. But no blushing or paling, or even weeping, as formerly; her mood remained unchangeably good; and finally the old woman concluded that Liesel had entirely conquered her fancied inclination, and, at sight of the grief in the castle, had decided that she was really very happy, and had every reason to look happily upon life. And so she rejoiced when she heard

the girl's light step and the clear voice sung those old songs of her childhood at her work; or when she, as formerly, joked with her father, and played all kinds of roguish pranks, which made even the mother laugh heartily.

And now Christmas was coming, as she so joyously informed Auntie; and as the old woman looked at her the little mouth whispered close to her ear, and she

Digitized by Google

heard something about "Christ-child, Christmas tree, Christmas work, and something so lovely, pretty, for Auntie, such as she could not imagine!"

And all this rejoicing, this happiness, a single moment, the single word "Lieschen," spoken softly, a single hasty hand-shake, had caused!

The short winter days passed very quickly; in Lieschen's room lay a gay confusion of balls of worsted, ribbons, and embroidery. The door was locked each time that she went downstairs, and the key hidden in her pocket; and down in the sitting-room the mistress of the house stood before a table and cut out little coats and jackets for the workmen's children. Those who were god-children of the father, the mother, Auntie, or Lieschen received a shining dollar besides in the lead savings-boxes which stood in a row in the sitting-room closet, each with the name of the little owner upon it.

The parents had already been in the city to do their Christmas shopping. Lieschen had placed a long list of wishes in her mother's hands, and at evening, when they returned, Dorte's and Minnie's strong arms could scarcely carry all the mysterious packages which the father handed out, one after another, from the carriage. And then there were questions, inspection, and admiration in the sitting-room, where the lamp stood on the round table, and hot tea steamed for the home-comers. "Here, papa, are your slippers. Is not my dear little mother frozen? That is for the pastor's wife, and these for the children. Does it please you, Lieschen?"

"Oh, the lovely dolls, and the soldiers—could not

Digitized by Google

one play with them one's-self? And the dresses for Dorte and Minnie; and a coat for each of them."

"They may laugh!" said Auntie, and felt the fine woollen cloth. "When I celebrated my first Christmas

here, as maid, there was cotton for one apron and a dollar given, and I felt like a queen that evening. You spoil the people, Minna; it is dreadful!"

"Ah, Auntie, do not scold," begged Lieschen; "wait till you see what the Christ-child brings you. Listen; it is so high, and has four legs, and yet cannot run; guess——"

"That is all very well," grumbled the old woman, good-naturedly, and helped carry the packages into the adjoining room, where they were to stay until the presentation. "Who knows what you will receive?" she continued. "But don't you look into my room, now, do you hear?" said she, "or else——"

"No, you dear Auntie; but there is something pretty for me in there, is there not? It seems to me that I

Digitized by Google

am going to receive something unusually nice this Christmas."

"Oh, really," laughed the old woman; "it is something unusual; for example——"

"An apple," Lieschen interrupted her, "with three wishes from a good fairy, whose real name is Auntie."

"Naturally! And then three silk dresses will be conjured from it, and with those you will go in the kitchen and hen-house, and Peter or fat Gottlieb can carry your train?"

"And then—then comes a prince, Auntie!"

"There we have it!" cried the old woman, with comic fright. "It all hangs upon that; you should have written a bridegroom upon your list of wishes, you foolish thing!"

"But it must be a prince, Auntie," cried the girl, laughing, and sang as she ran out:

> "There came then a prince o'er the waters so wide,
> And he is the king, and I am the bride!"

"It is possible," said the old woman, and shook her head.

And at length the holy evening came for all the world. It shed a reflection of the heavenly radiance upon each house; it lit the candles on the green trees in palace and hut, and their light fell upon happy faces, upon costly and modest gifts. The church bells rang out in the quiet, cold winter air, and invited people to a service of thanks; and high above the happy world the heaven spread out its dark-blue mantle; the stars shone down in sparkling, shining splendor, and "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men," echoed back to them.

Digitized by Google

Peace on earth! There were human homes into which the mild guest found no entrance, in which there was no festive joy, owing to grief and deep misery—ah, very many! And on no single day does a poor child of man feel more deeply its care, and its great grief, than on that one when all rejoice, when peace sinks into all hearts, only not into his; when the question occurs, Why am I—why are we only excluded from the joy?

The same silent question seemed to speak from the eyes of the young girl who stood at the window and gazed out into the starry night. "Down there in the mill the windows shine with bright light, there the Christmas tree burns," whispered she, and with hot, childish pain, pressed her hands against her breast. What a longing overcame her for its brilliant, light-adorned branches! To be sure, Lieschen had begged her to come; she should at least see the lights burn on the tree—but no, why should she? What did the miller's Christmas tree matter to her? It was not hers, and why should she look in Lieschen's happy face? Her quiet,

Digitized by Google

gloomy home would seem still sadder after such a sight. She turned and went up to her mother's chair, to lean her cheek against the dear face. She groped for it with her hand, and felt only the empty cushion. "Mamma!" cried she softly; all was silence. "She has gone upstairs to grandmamma also," whispered she, and sunk into the soft chair. "They all leave me alone; if they would only come back! Mamma and Army—ah, yes, Army is there." This was certainly a sweet consolation. To-morrow he surely would not have so much business to discuss with grandmamma. What could it be so important that they had talked about ever since his arrival? Still Blanche?

"At New Year's—scarcely eight days off," said the old lady dully, and looked gloomily before her.

"At New Year's," assented Army, who stood before her.

"And you say Hellwig has no advice?"

"So he told me."

"But, *dio mio!* Formerly it was not so hard for an officer to get money."

"Formerly? You forget, grandmamma, that our circumstances are widely known. No one is so stupid as to lend me money with the positive certainty of losing it, and especially such a sum. The only thing that I could obtain was postponement until the new year."

"And have you not once tried to take the path which I recommended to you as the only means of rescue?"

He glanced at her defiantly. "No," replied he firmly. "My creditors indeed advised me to do so, and would be of assistance to me; but a thousand times

Digitized by Google

rather go to America, and work like a slave, than such a yoke!"

"As you will!" said the old lady dryly. "It is your affair, not mine."

"Quite right," he laughed. "But, to the devil with the story! I did not come here to complain to you. I am to celebrate Christmas with you—Christmas!" he repeated mockingly.

Then there was silence. A year before he had stood at this hour in the Countess Stontheim's drawing-room; the innumerable candles of the tall Christmas tree shed a dazzling light upon the gold-worked carpet and costly furniture. It was reflected by splendid presents. But what was all this to the splendor which rose above the white girlish forehead and clung round the dainty figure like a costly veil—it was all so plain before his eyes.

"Good, then!" said his grandmother's voice. "Then I will try if I can obtain assistance. There are yet people in the world who have not forgotten the name Derenberg. To-morrow—no, to-day—I shall write to the Duke of R——."

The young man's lips wore a bitter expression. He thought of the picture upstairs in the ancestral hall, which represented his grandmother as a young, beautiful hostess, bidding the duke welcome to her hospitable home. "Beggary!" he thought scornfully. He passed his hand over his face, and glanced over at the tall black figure which stood so motionless before the table with an expression of firmest resolve. She pained him, the proud woman. He knew it would be indescribably hard for her to write such a letter.

"Leave that, grandmamma," said he softly; "you shall not so humiliate yourself——"

Digitized by Google

"No; I will not leave it," was the answer; "for I see I am the only one who can find a possible way of rescue, although I am only an old woman."

"But, grandmamma, will the old gentleman still remember you?"

She laughed. "Will you ever forget the picture of your betrothed?" asked she, and her black eyes fairly flashed in their brilliancy. "Surely not! Well, do you see, just as little the Duke of R—— Leonora von Derenberg, for he loved me, Army, from the moment when I stood opposite him for the first time. At that time he was still Crown Prince. My husband presented me at court; there was a festival there—I do not remember now for what it was held; then when I appeared on your grandfather's arm among the gay crowd which filled the room, illuminated as bright as day, because the ducal pair wished to see me, and the people right and left drew back and stared at the stranger—the Italian—as I bowed deeply before the noble pair, a slight sound of surprise met my ear, and as I raised my eyes they met those of a young, handsome man, which hung upon me in a fire of admiration. I was seventeen years old, Army; and what is there more intoxicating for a woman than to be admired, and—— It is over, over," whispered she; "why conjure up the past?"

"And?" asked the young man, and suddenly stood close before her.

"And," repeated she, dreamily, without glancing at his flushed face, "he often came to Derenberg. He was my cavalier on every occasion, until he went for a long tour. His good parents were anxious about him, and my husband, who played the most laughable Othello whom the world has ever seen, hated the gay

Digitized by Google

prince because my lips laughed when he spoke, and my eyes shone when I saw him, which they had formerly almost forgotten to do. Everything was so boundlessly wearisome that surrounded me—the sky, the earth, the people, even the entertainments which my husband arranged. He, in conjunction with the princely

parents, removed the butterfly who so violently circled round the lighted candle—in a plebeian manner, like everything here in this country. I knew who it was who made my husband attentive, who made him see the worst in the perfectly harmless intercourse. Oh, I hated him—my brother-in-law, this——"

"Grandmother! And you would write to this man!

Digitized by Google

Beg of him, because he once admired you? Him, whom my grandfather hated?"

"I am now an old woman, my child," replied she proudly, and threw back her still beautiful head, "and I am only responsible to myself for my actions. When, twenty years ago, all this poverty burst upon us, he wrote to me he had not forgotten the woman who had once charmed his young heart. I could have saved us by one step from the distressing circumstances, but I knew what I owed the name of Derenberg and myself." She stood before her grandson with raised hand, and her large eyes shone with noble pride.

"Do you think it will be easy for me to write to him?" she continued. "I do it for your sake, Army, for your hand is paralyzed by the little bit of misfortune which has touched you; it has made you a weak dreamer instead of a strong-willed man; therefore, I shall act in your place." She walked past him, and disappeared into the adjoining room. The door slammed so violently behind her that the dark-red curtains blew far into the room.

The young man, who remained there alone, stood quite motionless by the fire and looked into space. At times he shook his head slightly, and a bitter smile wandered about his mouth; then he drew himself up, as one who has suddenly taken a firm resolution.

"Army!" then called a soft voice, and through the folds of the red portières the blonde head of his sister peeped in; "Army, please come downstairs. Quick! Mamma sent me." She had hurried into the room. "Do you know what I think?" whispered she. "Mamma has lighted a fir tree, there is such a bright light coming through the crack of the door." He

Digitized by Google

looked in her eyes, which shone up at him so childishly happy. "Quick!" begged she. "Grandmamma will not come; she does not care to see German Christmas trees."

"Yes, come, Nelly," said he. It sounded strangely firm, and putting his arm round his little sister, he quickly drew her from the room.

Digitized by Google

XIV.

It was already twilight when Lieschen packed a dainty little basket full of delicacies upstairs in her room. Again and again something yet nicer was laid in, and at last she closed the puffing cover, and a half aloud "So, now; that is almost all chocolate and marchpane—those she likes best," came from her red lips. Then she began to sing, while she drew on a fur-lined jacket, and set the cap belonging to it—of black velvet, bordered with marten fur—rakishly on the brown braids. She looked scrutinizingly in the mirror, and suddenly began to laugh.

"Just like a boy! Auntie is right," said she, and pushed the dainty head-covering somewhat straighter. "Now the muff, and then I must hurry, so that I am home again punctually."

She seized muff and basket, and ran downstairs. "I am going to see Nelly," she called into the sitting-room, the door of which was ajar.

"Only come back at the right time, Liesel," warned Auntie, "or else uncle will be vexed, and the children cross. You know the Christmas tree is to be lighted for them at seven."

"Yes, yes; certainly," cried Lieschen, and was gone.

Auntie looked after her as she crossed the mill bridge. "Dear mercy!" thought she, "how will things look up at the castle? No Christmas man from Reichenbach will come there."

Digitized by Google

With that she rose, took the bunch of keys from the hook, fastened it to her snowy apron, and left the room. "I will see whether the Christmas tree room is nice and warm," said she, at the open door, and then went upstairs.

Up there the fire crackled gayly in the old green porcelain stove, the strange odor of the fir tree which stood in the middle of the large table met her, and the flags of tinsel rustled softly in the draught from the door. The old woman stood still and looked around the dim room. It was just as so many many, years ago; the same old table to-day bore the presents. Here she had come as a child, with little, thankful heart, and had looked at the bright lights of the tree. Here she had stood as a fresh young girl, and rejoiced with all her heart at the simple presents; and there, just opposite her place, Lisette's sweet face had looked through the branches of the tree. She thought she could still hear her happy "Does it please you too, Marie?"

The old woman slowly walked round the table; the

Digitized by Google

fire in the stove threw a flickering light on the pictures on the walls, on the stiff-backed flowery sofa, and illuminated the bouquet of roses upon the footstool which the old hands stroked caressingly. "The good child!" she murmured. "She took all these stitches for old Auntie; she also did so—Lisette; how busily her fingers could move! I still have it, the needle-book which she once laid under the burning tree for me, with the fat-beaked little dove, and the forget-me-not wreath on it. Ah, Christmas, Christmas! It is the loveliest feast!" How long shall she celebrate it also? And will they miss the old Auntie when her place is empty?

She wiped her eyes. No, no; Liesel will not forget her; she knows that Auntie would give her heart's blood for her. "But, one thing more, Lord!" whispered the old lips, and the hands folded themselves. "Let me live for one thing more—that I may see her as a happy wife near her husband—then I will gladly die. Old Auntie could never rest in her grave if she did not know that her darling was happy. Only one Christmas night, when Lieschen carries her child across the threshold of the old room, and the little hands joyously reach out for the burning tree—let me yet see that, then enough of life and happiness."

Meanwhile, the young girl sat beside Nelly by the fire, talking; opposite her, Army leaned back in his chair; he was busy with his thoughts, and only occasionally listened when the gay laugh of one of the girls roused him from his brooding.

"And mother received from father a pill-box," now said Lieschen. "On top was written, 'The best medicine,' and within lay money for the trip to Italy. You know, Nelly, the doctor always tells mamma she must

Digitized by Google

not pass the winter here; but she rebels with all her strength. Now she has half yielded."

"She surely will not go alone?" asked Nelly.

"No; papa is going with her, in any case, and——"

"Well, and——?"

"And I," added Lieschen hesitatingly.

"And are you not glad?" cried Nelly excitedly. "Oh, to Italy! How lovely it must be there!"

"No; I would rather stay here with Auntie. I am perfectly well, and no place can be nicer than our home."

"Oh, Lieschen, you little goose!" said Nelly.

"No, Nelly; you must not think I am a goose; but I have another reason, but you must not betray me, for I have not yet said anything to father about it. See, then, Bertha, the daughter of our head inspector in the mill; she has weak lungs. The doctor says only a stay in Vevey or Montreux can save her. She is much more ill than mother, and I would so like to have Bertha go in my place. I am still young; I will yet come here to talk of 'bella Italia' with your grandmamma."

Army suddenly rose and went to the window. The young girl had spoken softly, but nevertheless he had heard every syllable. So she was still the old good-hearted Liesel, who gave her bread and butter, and her bright threepences, which Auntie so carefully collected, to the first workingman's child whom she met. She still shook her head, half defiantly, half ashamed, when she was scolded, as at that time. And then another form rose before him—a delicate little figure, surrounded by red, lustrous hair—which started back from beggars, and the "rabble" were pitilessly driven from her door at a sign from her little hand. She drew

Digitized by Google

her gown around her with an expression of disgust if a cripple stretched out his hand imploringly to her when she was out on the promenade. "Do not give him anything, Army," she had said. "It is very distasteful to me. Come, come! Aunt gives immoderately to the poor." And so she had hurried past strange misery, and held her perfumed lace handkerchief to her face.

Outside, the park lay calm and snowy. Each tree stood out plainly from the clear background, and down there lights shone from the windows of the mill. The comfortable old house, how pleasantly it rose to his mind. As if hidden, one might there live in comfortable, care-free existence, without dread of the future, of coming oppressing need!

> "From the time of youth, from the time of youth,
> Rings a song yet in my heart;
> But how far those days, O how far in truth,
> That were once my part."

sounded tenderly and softly over to him. He turned; there she stood, at the old piano, the slender and so lightly built girlish form; her little head was bent somewhat forward, and Army thought, by the soft light which the lamp threw in this corner, that he could perceive a delicate flush on Lieschen's face. A deep emotion sounded in her voice.

"Now the last verse," begged Nelly. "Mamma likes to hear it so."

"I cannot," replied she softly, and turned back to the room.

"Oh, what a pity, Lieschen," now said Nelly's mother. "Not even a Christmas song?"

Immediately she went again to the piano and sung one.

Digitized by Google

Softly the last tones of the old Christmas song died in the lofty room. There was silence; for each one it

had awakened different recollections, and still they all sprung from the same ground.

The sickly woman there in the chair thought of the time when she, a young mother, had taught her boy these words, so that he could repeat them to his father, under the splendid Christmas tree; she saw again the charming boy, encircled by her arm, stand before the handsome man. She had knelt beside the child, and folded his little hands together in prayer. Many lights shone from the branches of the trees, and were reflected in the child's sparkling eyes; he also must be proud of his son. "Now pray, my boy!" and the clear, childish voice had spoken so seriously and touchingly.

This evening did not stand before the eyes of the young man. It had vanished from his remembrance; but he saw himself near two little girls, down there in

Digitized by Google

Auntie's room. Both sat on a bench at the old woman's feet, the rosy little mouths wide-opened, their eyes earnestly fixed on the distance. They sung, not with skill, it is true, but still so boldly, and so glowing with Christmas joy.

"Army is not singing, Auntie," the larger girl had interrupted the song, and glanced up questioningly at her.

"Then there will be no cakes for him when the Santa Claus comes," had been the answer.

Then the little one had tripped over to him. "Army, sing!" she had begged, with tears in her blue eyes, and as he defiantly shook his dark curly head she had put her little hands up to her face quite inconsolably. And then Santa Claus had come, in a great rough fur coat, and had rattled the nuts in his bag, and threateningly drawn a switch out from under his arm. "Are the children good, Auntie? Can they say their prayers?" he had asked in a hollow voice.

"Yes, the girls, indeed; but he, the boy there, is a little defiant fellow, who will not sing his Christmas hymn. Take him away to your snow cave, Santa Claus!" And then the little girl had cried loudly, and forgetting her shyness, had run over to the feared man.

"No, no, dear Santa Claus, do not take Army away with you! He is not naughty. I will not have a single cake either!" And Nelly had also joined in the disconsolate crying; and finally Santa Claus must leave without having heard a single prayer; and Auntie's consoling and the children's weeping sounded behind him. But he, the naughty boy, did not cry. He laughed when the last tip of the fur coat had disappeared, and boldly asserted that it had not been Santa

Digitized by Google

Claus at all, but Peter, the coachman, in the miller's coat, turned wrong side out.

Army recalled all these pleasant childhood experiences, and involuntarily the question forced itself to his lips, "Do you remember?" Then he was silent, as if startled by his words, which sounded so loud in the quiet room. They were all long past, these childish dreams. He was a man—a man? No, a weak dreamer, whom the little bit of misfortune in the house had paralyzed! She sat upstairs now, the old woman, and wrote, to save him, a letter which was perhaps the hardest in all her life; and she did it because he was no man.

"I must go home." Lieschen took her fur jacket from the chair.

"Oh, will you not stay this evening?" asked Nelly.

"Thank you. Unfortunately, I cannot," replied she hesitatingly. "The pastor and his family are coming to us to-day, you know, Nelly, and I must not be missing."

"Oh, truly! But come again soon."

"Certainly. But you, too, Nelly. Auntie would be inconsolable if you did not taste her festival cake."

"May I accompany you?" said Army's voice in her ear.

"Oh, no, thank you," stammered she confusedly, "I——"

"To-day is a holiday—you might meet some drunken men." He cut short her answer and took up his cap and sword.

It was a wonderful winter evening which had sunk over the earth that Christmas. Not a breath was stirring; the world lay there in perfect silence, wrapped in

Digitized by Google

a brilliant white spotless covering, overarched by a sky from which millions of stars sparkled through the clear, cold air. Down in the village the lighted windows shone out from under the snow-covered roofs; and up here at the turning point, by the snowy sandstone bench, stands a slender couple. The old linden stretches its bare branches, as if astonished, over the young heads, to hide them so that no eye may see them. Is it, then, now time for love? each bare twig seems to ask. Now, when no nightingale sings, no green foliage can whisper a love greeting?

"I shall help you to make your life less gloomy, Army? Really?" came hesitatingly from the red lips.

"If you will, Lieschen," replied he softly.

"If I will?" asked she, and great tears fell from the blue eyes. "Ah, Army, you do not know what I——"

"You must not cry, Lieschen," begged he, and kissed her forehead lightly and timidly.

"Ah, let me," whispered she, blushing, and leaned more closely against him; "let me. I am weeping with happiness—too great happiness."

How had it happened? How did she feel now as she walked over the mill bridge alone? Was it, then, possible, or did a malicious dream dance before her eyes? But no; she heard his earnest words so plainly—the kiss on her forehead still burned like fire—it was reality; it was no dream; and to-morrow—her heart began to beat violently as she saw the bright windows of the house—then he would come to her father. Ah, yes; how beautiful life was; and she was betrothed—a happy betrothed; his betrothed!

She stood and looked back; now he must be walking up there, past the solitary old linden which, in spite

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

of snow and ice, had seen the sweetest happiness bloom this evening. He loved her—really loved her? She shook her head at the miracle—the never hoped for miracle; and would not her parents and Auntie see that she—— No, no, not yet; not until the pastor's family are gone; then she would tell her father that to-morrow some one was coming who——

And now she entered the door. The old knocker rapped so horribly loudly to-day, and she wished to first run up, unobserved, to her room. No, she could not; for just then Auntie raised the curtain from the glass door, and immediately after it was opened.

"Oh, you long stayer!" said the old voice pleasantly. "I was just about to send Dorte; we thought some one had carried you off."

"Good evening!" replied she, but her voice almost failed her from the stormy beating of her heart. "Is it really so late already?"

"Well, I think so," said the old woman, and closed the door behind her. There sat the father at the round table, and mother and Uncle Pastor on the sofa.

"There you are!" her father greeted her pleasantly, and drew the slender figure to him. "What do you say now, Liesel? Only think, the children in the parsonage have scarlet fever, and cannot come to the Christmas tree. Is it not sad?"

"Very sad!" replied she, but her eyes shone so strangely, and such a happy smile played about her mouth, that was not in harmony with her words. At any other time she would have broken out in loud regret, but to-day she scarcely understood what was told her.

"Uncle Pastor" looked at her quite surprisedly.

Digitized by Google

"Child, you look so heated," said the mother. "You must have run very fast?"

"Yes, yes," teased Auntie; "all is not right with the girl. See how crooked her fur cap is! Come here, my heart's blossom—you forget that you still have your things on."

"Never mind, Auntie. I will take them off upstairs in my room. I will be down right away again," and she was gone.

"What is the matter with the child?" asked Mrs. Erving anxiously.

But the child stood in her little room, breathing heavily. The fur jacket and cap flew to the nearest

chair, and then she sunk on her knees before the bed, where she said her prayers every evening, and buried her glowing face in the pillows, and folded her hands; but no word came from the lips; only from her heart rose a confused prayer of thanks, a nameless shyness, an indescribable feeling of happiness. At length she sprang up and opened the window. "Up there! up

Digitized by Google

there!" she whispered, and waved her hand, as if he could see. Did he think of her now? Had he told his mother that he had held little, childish Lieschen from the mill in his arms and kissed her? And Nelly?

"Lieschen! Lieschen!" was called from below.

"At once," answered she—it sounded like a cry of joy. She took the lamp and went to the mirror; dark, glowing eyes looked out of the glass at her. "His betrothed!" she whispered. "His betrothed!" and a deep blush overspread her face. She quickly put out the light, and hurried downstairs.

"They are already in the dining-room, miss," Dorte called to her, and then she suddenly giggled. "Oh, goodness, goodness, miss, there is a secret bride in the house. Only see—one, two, three lights!"

The young girl, who already held the knob of the dining-room door in her hand, turned round, blushing deeply. Truly, there stood Dorte, with the kitchen lamp, there hung the green-shaded lamp from the wall, and Auntie had just come from her room with, and held her hand protectingly before, the flickering wax-candle, so that the light fell full upon the good old face.

"It is possible," said she, as if vexed. "Girl, you are perfectly crazy; there she cries out so that I thought at least she had taken the grand prize in the lottery. Secret bride! Foolishness; you know best who it is yourself! Every night a pair of lovers stand at the garden gate, in spite of the deepest snow. Go in, child. I will come at once." She turned to Lieschen, who hesitatingly opened the door of the dining-room and entered with the old woman.

There they sat, the father, the mother, and the pastor; and the latter asked a blessing, and then Dorte

Digitized by Google

appeared with the fragrant roast goose, which the host proceeded to carve.

"And do you know, pastor," said he, continuing an interrupted conversation, and sharpened the knife on the steel, "it would be a true blessing if the affair really came to something; but I cannot believe in it; it has been talked of for ten years."

"Yes; I cannot tell you anything more, Frederick," replied the pastor, "than what I heard recently in B——, from the builder, Leonhardt. He said in the spring a commission would come to purchase the land, and as soon as this is done, the building will be begun. Railroad or not, as far as I am concerned, I only wish——" He passed his hand over his forehead.

"You are worried about the children's sickness, pastor?" asked the hostess, after a pause, sympathetically.

"Well, yes, to be frank," replied he, and looked really troubled. "We are all in God's hand, but the human heart is easily discouraged. The malicious illness broke out especially severely this year. The children are sick in very many of the village houses. I have buried one, or even two, from many families; and with all submission to the Master's will, Minna, anxiety cannot be driven away."

"For Heaven's sake, uncle, is it so bad?" Lieschen looked at him with great frightened eyes. She suddenly seemed, in the highest degree, unlovable to herself; she had, in her rapture, not noticed at all his anxiety at first. "Shall I come with you? Shall I help?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Lieschen; it is a dangerous, contagious disease—not for the world!" said the clergyman pleasantly, and pressed her little hand. "No,

Digitized by Google

no, my Rosine will tend them alone; one must not thoughtlessly expose one's-self to danger. You are the only child; you must spare yourself for your parents. No, I thank you, Lieschen, we will get along. However, I must go home soon after dinner. Rosine drove me away."

"Well, come, pastor," said the host heartily, and raised his glass cordially, "let us drink to the hope that things may soon go better at home and all anxiety be useless!"

"But when were they taken sick, uncle?" asked Lieschen. "Yesterday, when I came out of church, they were playing noisily before your door—at least, the girls were."

"Well, my child, this is the way it was. After they had had their presents yesterday evening, little Bernhard would not eat. Lena cried that her neck hurt her, and the oldest one complained of headache. They were put to bed, and drank elder tea, and this morning all three had bright red cheeks, and cried, the poor things; and the doctor came, and said, 'Stay in bed.'"

"Yes, yes," nodded Auntie. "Sickness comes by extra post, and goes away on crutches. What a pity on the lovely Christmas festival!"

"Well, the tree shall stand until they are well again, and then they will have a double pleasure in the presents. God grant that no one is missing at that time," said the host.

The pastor's grave face lightened. "But enough of this," said he, collecting himself; "I do not wish to spoil your pleasure—eh, Lieschen? Laugh again, you looked so radiant before. What did you and Nelly do?

Digitized by Google

Your face shone like the personification of pleasure and happiness."

The young girl blushed crimson, and lowered her eyes shyly to her plate.

"But things cannot look very bright up there," interposed Mr. Erving.

"Ah, yes; there is bitter misery there also, it is true," sighed the pastor. "Little children, little cares; large children, large cares! It is so in the world."

"But, dear patience," said the old woman, "we must have a little bit of confidence in God. I am not worried about Army; the false love will not crush the heart of such fresh young life; besides, he is proud, and unhappy love is the kindling of new love. He will soon have another sweetheart."

"Well, that is a secondary affair, Auntie; but the unfortunate circumstances besides, and——"

Bang! The door had closed, and the young girl disappeared. The others glanced at each other in surprise.

"And the precious money!" continued the pastor. "The debts have not grown less since the engagement. Gay life is in his blood, so to speak. Well, you know, Frederick, they say there are noble passions. What will become of him, God knows."

"What?" asked the host, in a tone of the deepest sympathy. "Has he begun so already? Confound it, where did you hear that?"

"I learned that quite accidentally, recently. Frederick, you know I was in B—— a short time ago, and called upon Count S——, in whose house I was tutor for five years. Then the Count asked about affairs here. At that time people were wondering a great deal at the strangely suddenly broken engagement, and the

Digitized by Google

poor jilted groom, and it was then I learned that he is on the verge of bankruptcy. He is greatly pitied by every one, and the behavior of the young lady, as well as that of her father, severely censured; and I must say——"

"Did you hear anything more definite?" asked Mrs. Erving sympathetically.

"Well, yes—he must have been madly in love with the little red head; and in his fondness purchased carriages and all sorts of things for his betrothed, and in this manner incurred large debts. Unfortunately, the aunt died before the wedding, and at the opening of the will it was discovered that the niece is the sole heiress. Immediately she informed him of the fact, and now he sits there with his debts and does not know what to do."

The host drummed his finger violently on the table. "That you—that you——" said he, in an undertone; "and what will he do now?"

"What will he do? Good gracious! What do all such? Most probably he will go across the water——"

"You mean to America?"

"Yes. What else, Frederick? I assure you, I know that. During my stay in the Count's house I had so many glances into this circle—it is an exposed life, the officer life. Heaven knows how it happens; it begins so easily with a note, and in a short time they are in debt up to their ears. The usurers—those stranglers—when they once have one in their grip, he does not get away again. Yes, yes; it is a bad world," he added, rising. "But now I must think of going. How will it be at home?"

"We are very sorry, pastor, really," said Erving,

Digitized by Google

and helped his friend draw on his long overcoat. "The poor woman up there must drain the bitterness of life to the dregs, if she has that also to experience—to send the boy to America!"

"Well, well; he can seek his fortune in this country. He is a clever boy. Why should he go to America?" interposed Auntie.

"Yes, Auntie," the clergyman interrupted her, and tapped the old woman on the shoulder. "You do not understand that. Such a gentleman, who has once worn the gay coat, does much better to go to a strange land, where no one knows him."

"Oh, nonsense!" said the old woman angrily. "Arrogance is a sin in all, whether they wear a helmet or carry a flag. What one sows he must reap. He surely will not leave mother and sister!"

"Well, it is possible that all may yet be well. Many a one has saved himself in a wonderful manner. Perhaps he will win a wealthy girl. He is a handsome fellow. Good night, Minna; good night, Frederick; sleep well, Auntie—there is more grief than happiness in the world; but life is only a time of probation. Well, once more, good night."

"Sleep well, pastor, and a happy convalescence at home!" cried the host, and accompanied the departing man to the mill bridge; then he returned, shaking his head. "It is a pity about the boy!" said he in an undertone. "Thank God, I have none; that might happen to me, eh, Auntie?" he asked the old woman, who just peeped in the door. "Girls are better than boys. It is good that Liesel is not a boy."

"Very true, Frederick; but you know there is also a disadvantage in girls. Your blessed grandmother

Digitized by Google

always said, 'Daughters are like floating property,' and that is true. To-day yours, to-morrow a strange man's. But did you see Liesel? I sent Minna to bed—she complained a little of headache; but where is the girl hiding?"

Digitized by Google

XV.

AUNTIE sought her Liesel everywhere. She was not in the sitting-room or in the Christmas room, and now she cautiously opened the door of the girl's chamber; it was quite dark there, but yonder, by the window, stood a slender, motionless figure, and gazed out into the silent, bright, snowy night.

"Liesel!" called the old woman softly.

"Auntie," was the embarrassed answer.

"Tell me, child, what is the matter, then? Have you a headache? Are you ill?"

But, instead of answering, the soft, girlish arms were thrown round her, a glowing face was hidden on her neck, and the form which leaned against her trembled with suppressed sobs.

"Child—Liesel—what is it?" asked the old woman, startled. "Has any one done anything to you?"

She shook her head.

"What is it, then, my heart? Tell me," and she drew the resisting girl to the sofa, sat down beside her, and held her in a close embrace.

"Ah, Auntie; dearest, best Auntie——"

"What is it, my heart's dearest? Now? You are surely laughing?" she asked immediately after. "You foolish thing! What does that mean?"

"Ah, I could laugh and cry, and—I do not know what all," whispered she. "Shut your eyes, Auntie. I will tell you why—ah, I am so afraid of you——"

Digitized by Google

"Afraid of me? Well, I must say that looks like you. Now, come—come—what has happened?"

"I—I—am engaged, Auntie," came softly and hesitatingly from her lips. "Did you not guess it at once?"

"Engaged? Child!" The old woman held her breath.

"Ah, Auntie, I am so happy—so happy! Army——"

"Army!" groaned the old woman, and her teeth set

in fright. "Army! You engaged?" repeated she dully. "So, then; so, then!"

"Auntie!" cried the anxious voice again—"Auntie, have you, then, no pleasant word? I know you are worried about the grandmother. I have also thought of that, but I am not at all afraid, even if Army had a hundred grandmothers. We love each other so dearly, so dearly!"

"Love? He loves you?"

"But, Auntie, what do you ask?" was the proud and offended answer. "Would he else have wished me for his bride?"

Digitized by Google

"Merciful God!" the old woman's heart cried out; "the poor, foolish child! She believes herself loved, and he—he only wishes her money to save himself." Her money, to be sure. Had she only first heard how his affairs stood. But her mouth was silent; in dumb terror she groped with her cold hand for her darling's which lay there in hers, glowing like fire; and then the sweet voice whispered again in her ear. Was it not just such sweet, foolish nonsense as when Lisette had confided to her her young love?

"Only think, Auntie. I can make his life happy again. For my sake, he will learn to love it again—how beautiful that is! I can do that, Auntie—is it, then, really true? Ah, Auntie, out there under the old snow-laden linden, where I once saw him three years ago, he asked me. And now you will tell father and mother, will you not? I should die of—of shame if I must acknowledge that I love a strange man. I cannot; please do it. If it were not dark here, I could never have told you. Auntie, please speak; give me one single kiss——"

Lisette—Lisette—was it not she who just whispered? "Oh, my God!"—the old faithful heart was tormented—"is this the happiness which I have begged for the child every morning and evening? Has she not deserved something a thousand times better than this lot?" And still she bent down and kissed the great blue eyes, in which were the happiest tears which are ever wept in the life of a woman.

"Liesel," at length said she constrainedly, "you do not know what you have done, what lies before you, if this unhappy—do not be angry with me, but I must speak so—this unhappy engagement really takes place.

Digitized by Google

You do not know the old baroness as I know her. She will make you miserable, like my poor Lisette, whose fate is on her conscience; and I think that my conscience also would not be clear if the misfortune occurred, and I had not warned you now, when it is yet time, and when as yet no one knows of your love but you two and me. Be quiet!" whispered she, as Lieschen wished to interrupt her. "Oblige old Auntie and yourself. What I wish to tell you tastes bitter, but it is a remedy, and God grant that it may enter into you and help you. It is the story of Lisette—you remember, I wished to tell it to you in the spring, because I saw your love coming; but at that time I could not bring it over my lips—had I only done it!"

The young girl crouched silently at her feet; not a sound from her lips betrayed how the young, scarcely blossomed girlish happiness in her heart shuddered, as if suddenly an icy cold storm had burst over the laughing spring.

"So, then, Baron Fritz," began the old woman hesitatingly, "the brother of Nelly's and Army's grandfather, was Lisette's betrothed. They had secretly engaged themselves to each other; no one knew of it but me. Baron Fritz wished to lay his suit before Lisette's parents, and speak with his brother only when he was of age, and then they would buy themselves an estate. They were a happy pair, Liesel, and a handsome one, besides; and they loved each other so dearly. It was a pleasure to see them together, down there in the old arbor by the water. Baron Fritz was stationed as gay Hussar officer in a little city not far from here; he often came over, and when it was time for him to arrive Lisette stood by the window in her room and

Digitized by Google

looked over at the tower, and then a light flashed out from up there—that was the signal that he was coming to her. Then she laughed for joy, and clapped her hands together, and ran into the woods a little way to meet him.

"And then, one Saturday evening, his brother's young, beautiful wife, Nelly's grandmother, entered the castle. Lisette and I had run there to see her; the whole castle was illuminated, and the servants waited at the entrance with torches, and Baron Fritz stood there with his old mother, and then the young couple came driving up. It must be said that the young wife was beautiful; but there was pride in her bearing, pride on the pale face, and pride shone from the great black eyes. Lisette grew quite white when she looked at her.

"'She will not be my friend, Marie,' said she to me.

"And she was right. God knows how the proud woman learned that Baron Fritz was in love with Lisette, and who suggested to her the devilish plan for separating them. I only know one thing—she succeeded. And how well—yes, how well she succeeded!

"It was in autumn, and the castle full of guests for the hunting. One could plainly hear the horns in the forest, and every evening the castle windows were brightly illuminated. The mad life began up there which the mistress of the castle so loved, and by which she has almost beggared her family. But Baron Fritz took leave of Lisette; he could not come again for a long time, and she gave him a little gold heart, which she always wore. I heard her tell him, 'There, love, put the lock of my hair in it, and think of me!' See, Lieschen, this golden heart was Lisette's death. But listen further. Baron Fritz went away, and so passed

Digitized by Google

two weeks. The lovers could not write to each other, for then everything would have become public; besides, at that time they were not so great at writing as they are to-day; but they thought so much the more of each other, and often it is the other way now. Well, then, Fritz went away, and every evening, from habit, Lisette stood at the window, and looked over at the tower room, for Baron Fritz always occupied that when he was here. But it remained dark every evening, and still it could not possibly be otherwise, for he could not be back again for four weeks, and only two had elapsed. Then, one evening, Lisette cried out, and ran to me, for I had just come with my knitting to talk with her a little.

"'Heavens!' cried she, 'he is there—there is a light in the tower,' and, truly, the light shone from the bay-window. She did not even take a shawl, and flew out of the house. After a while she came back. 'He did not come,' said she; 'what does that mean?' I shook my head. 'Well, wait, Lisette! I will ask Christian to-morrow.' But Christian did not come, and at noon a boy brought me a message that I must not expect him, for he had gone on a journey for the mistress, to buy her a new horse.

"Well, Lisette was in a state of uneasiness which cannot be described. As soon as twilight fell she stood at the window, and again the light was visible up there. Then she ran outside, and came back pale, and threw herself, weeping, on the sofa. God knows she must have had already some suspicion of what was before her, for she would hear no consolation. 'He is there, and does not come; he loves me no longer,' sobbed she. 'Ah, I shall die if it is so.'

Digitized by Google

"On the third evening the same story; Lisette looked like the plastering on the wall. Then the tower room remained dark.

"Perhaps four days after Lisette and I sat before the house door, in the noonday sunhsine, and plucked birds, and she watched the feathers flying in the air, while one sigh after another came from her lips. Then a girl came over the mill bridge. At first we did not know her, for her new red dress with the black stripes fairly dazzled our eyes, but then Lisette said, 'That is certainly that wild Fanny. What does she want here?' It was really she, and she came dancing up to us on her dainty feet, which were encased in snowy stockings, and little shoes fastened over her instep. She wore a black cloak, and two long braids of just as black hair hung down her back; her face, with the sparkling eyes and little nose, was turned to Lisette in the most friendly fashion. Now, you must know, Liesel, that the wild Fanny had gone with us to confirmation, and there had never been a wilder girl. Gypsies had once left her, a child scarcely eight days old, behind the churchyard hedge, and she grew up in the poorhouse. She was always frivolous and lazy, the annoyance of the whole region; but she pleased the baroness when once she came to the castle with a basket of berries. 'She reminded her of her home,' she had said, and so Fanny entered the lady's service, and went about dressed as gayly as if every day were a holiday.

"But soon we heard that she was still the wild Fanny; so many strange gentlemen came to the castle, and Fanny was pretty—too pretty—and she could certainly have found a nice fellow who would have kissed her as his honest sweetheart; but she was as bad as the worst,

Digitized by Google

and—God be thanked that there is still chastity and honor among us.

"And so, then, she came here. In her little ears hung great shining gold hoops, and she had a ring on the hand, too, with which she so frequently stroked her snow-white apron.

"'Good day!' cried she to us, and Lisette answered, 'Good day!' and asked, 'What do you want, Fanny?'

"'Oh, mercy! I saw mam'selle sitting here, and wished to see how you are. You need not be ashamed of me; we were confirmed together — or have you grown proud?'

"'No,' replied Lisette, 'I am not proud; but when you come it means something. Tell me quickly what you want!'

"'Nothing at all, my dear,' replied she, and acted as if offended. 'You need not be ashamed of me. I do not beg any more. I have my bread, and more, too,' and with that she laughed so that all her white teeth showed, and whirled round on her tiptoes so that the red dress and the braids flew out. 'You look so pale,' said she, then, suddenly, and stared at Lisette's face. 'Are you crossed in love, hey?'

"Lisette blushed to the roots of her hair. 'What does it matter to you how I look?' replied she, shortly, and rose so quickly that the fine feathers flew from her apron.

"'Hey!' said Fanny, joyously—'hey! how they fly! I would like to be a bird, and fly until I came to my sweetheart!' And at that she sprung up and laughed as if crazy.

"All at once I saw that Lisette's eyes seemed starting from her head, and that, deathly pale, she clutched

Digitized by Google

at her heart and sunk down on the bench; and when my eyes followed hers, they fell on a little gold heart which protruded from Fanny's neckerchief, and quivered on a little gold chain at all the girl's mad leaps.

"'Almighty God!' screamed Lisette; but then, with one bound, she stood near Fanny, seized her by the shoulder, and asked, in a voice that went through one, so full of shrill anguish was it, 'Where did you get that heart, Fanny?'

"For a moment all was still after this question, and the two looked at each other. Lisette wished to read the words on Fanny's lips with her great, anxious eyes; and Fanny had leaned her head far back, and gazed at her with sparkling eyes; she stood there with folded arms, and gradually her mouth took on a scornful smile.

"'What does it concern you?' she asked, and tried to free herself.

"'What does it concern me? Oh, heavens! she asks how it concerns me! Marie, help me!' cried Lisette. 'I must have it again; it is mine—no, his. Oh, God, I gave it to him!'

"I came nearer, quite stiff with fright. 'Give the thing here, Fanny,' said I. 'You found it, did you not?'

"'What does she think, then?' cried she, and shook off Lisette's hand, which lay heavily on her shoulder. 'I am surprised that you do not say I stole it. It is my property. I will only let the one who gave it to me take it from me, and now do not touch me. I should think you would remember that I can scratch.' She drew back, her hands were clinched, then she quickly turned to go.

Digitized by Google

"'Stop!' cried Lisette, and clutched her arm again. 'I ask you, for God's sake, who gave you that heart?' She stood drawn up to her full height before the girl, and held her hand up, as if conjuring her to speak. But this hand shook, and a perceptible tremor ran through her form. I will never forget the moment, Lieschen. I wished to go to her, to support her, but I had to stand and look at her, she was so beautiful; a ray of the autumn sun fell through the bare branches of the old linden upon her brown hair, so that it really looked like a halo; and she stood there like a saint—like an angel before a lost one.

"Fanny's brown face had become very pale as her eyes met Lisette's, but then she tore herself away, and said, 'Why do you wish to know? Did I ever ask you who gave you the gold ring which you kissed in the arbor recently? Yes, yes, I saw that,' laughed she, 'and cannot I also have secretly a lover? Do you think because you are the rich rag-miller's beautiful Lisette that the wild Fanny pleases no one? Good bye, Lisette, and do not act so surprised. I will say nothing more.' She laughed mockingly, and ran over the mill bridge, while the red dress in the dazzling sunlight fairly blinded one's eyes.

Digitized by Google

"But Lisette stood there, pale and rigid, and looked after her; and when I went to her and wished to comfort her, she hastily pushed me back, and then she went upstairs to her room. I did not know what to do, child; whether I should follow her or not. My heart beat almost to bursting; and as I stood there Lisette's mother came and gave me an order, and scolded because the feathers were so scattered over the place. I did what she told me, but the tears fell from my eyes as I thought of poor Lisette's great grief. Heavens! who would have thought it? Was it, then, really true that he had given his sweetheart's keepsake to that bad creature? But, really, where else could she have gotten it? And then, the light for three evenings in succession in the tower room! Oh, mercy! I thought, what will happen now? And as soon as I could I ran up to Lisette; and there she stood at the window, and looked over at the castle; and when I went up to her, and wished to put my arm round her, she said, quite softly:

"'Never mind, Marie. Why do you wish to comfort me? Go downstairs—only go! I will conquer it alone.'

"I shook my head and went. I could scarcely speak for tears; but, just as I was closing the room door, she screamed out so fearfully, so piercingly; and as I ran back, startled, she shook as if she had the palsy, and then she sunk to the floor. I wished to raise her, but she lay as heavy in my arms as a corpse, and her mother came hurrying up the stairs already, and—oh, child, how can I describe it to you! It seems to me like a strange, horrible dream. Lisette was very ill. The doctor gave no hope. The parents were inconsolable, and whoever knew her mourned with them. I sat

Digitized by Google

day and night beside her bed, and listened to her wild ravings; and then she talked so sweetly, and told something to her lover, so that my heart almost stood still with pain. Her mother first learned from the confused delirium her child's happiness and pain. I must tell her all. She gave a long, sorrowful glance at the lovely being who had so abruptly been hurled from her heaven. But the father raged and cursed the faithless one. Only Lisette's brother said:

"'There is some devilish trickery behind this. I know Fritz; there is not a false hair in his head.'

"Ah, child, what prayers and tears there were in the little room then. We wrung our hands sore for the young life, but the dear God lets his hour be appointed by no one; and on the ninth day, just when the sunset shone with such a golden light, its glow fell upon a pale face, and the blue eyes were closed forever. So peacefully she lay there, so quiet and far from all heartache. But I threw myself down, then, and screamed with too great torture and pain——"

The old woman hushed and wiped her eyes. Lieschen had hidden her head in her apron, and sobbed softly.

"The same evening," continued Auntie, at length, "that Lisette died, I ran in the garden, just as they were tolling the bell for her down in the village, for I could not stay in one place; and as I stood there, all at once a light shone out from the tower. I was frightened, and then my tears burst forth again, for she who now lay there so quietly could never again see it. And so I leaned against the wall of the house, and cried from the bottom of my heart. From within, I heard the miller's steps in the sitting-room—he walked restlessly up and down—and then again the mother's sobs,

Digitized by Google

and her son's comforting words; all else was quiet around—as quiet as death. The ringing also had ceased now. The mill wheels had been motionless all day, and the girls and boys over there in the house crept around as softly, and only whispered to each other, as if they did not wish to disturb our Lisette's rest.

"And then all at once I heard some one coming from up there—such a firm, quick step. Heavens! my Christian? thought I, but at the same moment some one stepped on to the mill bridge, and a bold voice began to troll a song so loudly and happily—it went through and through me. Mercy! it was Baron Fritz's voice. And, before I could prevent it, for I was paralyzed with fright, he went into the house; and when I followed him he had already opened the room door, and stood opposite the miller. His happy face and sparkling eyes looked in every corner for Lisette.

"The mistress sunk back in her chair with a cry of fright when she saw him, but the miller rushed at him, with the words:

"'Accursed scoundrel, will you mock me in my grief?' and dragged him into the room.

"The miller was a furious man, but Lisette's brother sprung between the two strugglers, and cried:

"'First ask him if he is guilty, father!'

"But the old man placed himself before him, and cried: 'Lisette! You probably seek Lisette, Sir Baron? She lies upstairs; go up and look at her!' Then he clasped his hands before his face in hot, wild agony.

"'Come, Fritz,' said our young master, and drew the frightened fellow into the adjoining room. 'Come here! I will tell you all the grief that has burst over

Digitized by Google

us.' And then the door closed behind them, and I remained alone with the weeping parents.

"From the next room we could not hear a word, only once a groan of agony—that was all. The minutes

passed as if in endless pain. I sat at the window and looked out into the night; but suddenly I started back, for, outside, a face had pressed itself against the panes, and a pair of large dark eyes, from which shone fear and terror, looked into the room, and then beckoned with her hand, and the face had disappeared. I had recognized it—it was wild Fanny's.

"'God help us!' thought I, 'what does she want again?' But I went softly out, and there she stood, and

Digitized by Google

clung with both hands to the posts of the house door, and the faint reflection of the lamp in the hall showed a face distorted with fear, over which the loosened black hair hung, making the apparition still more startling. She trembled so that she could scarcely stand; and when I looked at her questioningly and surprised, her pale lips moved without a word coming from them.

"'Lisette,' asked she, with almost suffocated voice—'is it true what people say? Were those bells ringing for Lisette?'

"'She lies upstairs in eternal sleep,' replied I.

"'Almighty God!' screamed the girl; 'is it true—is it really true?' And then she sunk back and clutched her hand in her wild hair, and behaved like a desperate one.

"At that moment Baron Fritz came out of the next door, behind him our young master, who carried a light in his hand. He was pale as death, and his eyes fairly glowed in his head. Evidently he was about to go up to the chamber of death. Then his eyes fell upon the form on the floor, and recognizing her, he stopped.

"'And it is to her that I gave my love's souvenir?' said he strangely calmly, while his eyes rested upon her with a scornful expression. 'Frederick, do you believe that? Speak, you creature,' cried he, in a trembling voice. 'You stole the gold heart which I missed at the last moment before my departure!'

"The girl raised her hands to him. 'No; oh, no, Sir Baron.'

"'Will you confess, you good-for-nothing creature?' cried he, and raised the riding-whip which he held in his hand to strike.

Digitized by Google

"'Strike me, sir,' cried she; 'I deserve it. But I did not steal it—as true as there is a God, I did not! Some one gave it to me, as true as I lie here. I would never have hung it round my neck in fun if I had known what would happen.'

"Baron Fritz let his uplifted arm sink. 'Out with you,' cried he, and pointed to the door; 'you shall, at least, not disturb the peace here in this house of mourning. I will settle with you yet.'

"She rose. 'Have pity, sir!' cried she; 'forgive me. I am a vain, stupid thing, but I am not bad. Oh, Sir Baron, I would gladly die if I could make Lisette alive again!'

"She looked so crushed, so really miserable, as she stood before him, her hands clasped, with her tearful dark eyes, that our young master begged Baron Fritz: 'Ask her who commanded her to hang the little heart round her neck in fun! Perhaps she will say.'

"'Who told you to hang the gold heart round your neck?' repeated the baron mechanically, and all at once something like a suspicion of horror shone in his eyes. He hastily repeated the same question, as the girl did not move, but only stared at him, as if out of her mind.

"'Tell him, Fanny,' persuaded the young gentleman. 'Tell him, if we are really to believe that you did not mean any harm when you——'

"'No, really,' screamed she; 'I did not mean any harm. I only wanted to vex Lisette, because she was always so proud to me, and still I could do nothing to her; and so I was glad when she told me I should—— No, I will not betray it—I dare not betray anything.'

"She trembled in her whole frame.

Digitized by Google

"'Go,' said Baron Fritz suddenly. 'I will not know it now. A trick has been played—a devilish trick!'

"He pointed outside with his arm, and the girl ran, sobbing, out into the dark night. I went to the door, and looked after her. I could see the figure flying over the mill bridge, and then she disappeared in the darkness. But it was a strange night: there was a strange whistling and howling through the air; the sky was overcast, not a single star was visible, and the branches of the old linden sighed and bent under the violent gusts of wind. It had grown fairly terrifying, the night, and yet I stood there. When such a sudden storm approaches we say a desperate human being has taken its own life, and one prays for the poor soul, even if one does not know who it may be; and I folded my hands, and was about to say a prayer, when it suddenly occurred to me in my fright—Suppose Fanny—— At first I wanted to hurry after her; then I stopped. Why should I look for her?

"The wind pulled and tore at my clothes, and rushed through the forest so that its howling and sighing rose above the rushing water, and again and again rang in my ears what Baron Fritz had just said so calmly: 'A trick has been played—a devilish trick!' No, certainly Baron Fritz was innocent; but who—— And then like a flash rose to my mind the image of the beautiful mistress of the castle. I shook my head; what did that mean? But persistently those proud, arrogant features again appeared before my eyes, and a long line of thoughts and possibilities with them.

"In the room, the miller's restless walking up and down had begun again, and again were heard the mother's sobs, the son's words of comfort—but where

Digitized by Google

was Baron Fritz? Still upstairs beside the deathbed? Down in the village it struck ten o'clock; then I heard a step coming down the stairs, as slowly and hesitatingly as if it were an old man. I looked into the hall; there he stood by the stairs. He looked pale as a corpse—his handsome, merry face was scarcely recog-

nizable. He glanced up once more, and then slowly walked to the sitting-room, where he stood close before it; he shuddered, turned quickly round, and went past me without seeing me into the gloomy night, like a poor, crushed man. It was the last time I ever saw him. They say he led a wild, mad life—how his heart must have cried out with grief! He never came to

Digitized by Google

Derenberg again, and now he is probably long dead. May God grant him peace!

"But the wild Fanny had disappeared also—no one knew where. And in the castle and the village they all said that the young baron had gone away with her, and even I doubted his fidelity once. But when Lisette was buried, one evening I went with my Christian to her grave in the churchyard; and as I stood there and cried, and straightened all the wreaths which the people had sent, Christian said, 'See, Marie, there lies something white, like a note,' and truly; and there was a little stone laid on it, so that it should not blow away, and when I unfolded it, there stood, in great, awkward letters: 'It is not true what they say; he never looked at me. I do not know where he is, nor he where I am. I will never see one of you again. You think too badly of me. I wore the gold heart because my mistress commanded me. She said it was only for a joke on Lisette. Sanna was there—you can ask her. May God forgive me! I did not mean any harm. FRANZISKA.'

"That had she done so that the rag-miller's Lisette should not come into her proud family; and, child"—the old woman softly stroked the hair of the deeply shocked girl at her feet—"you, our only one, do not do this to yourself and to us; let us not experience such unhappiness a second time. See, my poor heart, although I am bitterly grieved for you, I can only tell you one thing: try to forget what you have to-day experienced."

The young girl shook her head. "No, no, Auntie," said she, anxiously; "you cannot mean that. How could I ever forget it? The story of Aunt Lisette is

Digitized by Google

very sad, but when I have told it to Army he will be warned. Be compassionate, Auntie, and do not dissuade me," she added, after a short time, rousing to passion, while she embraced the old woman's knees. "We love each other so dearly—so dearly! Help us to be happy. Tell father and mother, and persuade them—will you not? You will, dear, good Auntie, will you not?" And the tortured girl's moist eyes looked up at her pleadingly.

"My God!" thought the old woman, "it has been no use. It is just as it always is with love, which will never be wise except to its own detriment; and yet he does not love her—it is not true. If I only had the heart to tell her that!—and Frederick will never consent——"

"Will you speak to my parents, Auntie?" she whispered, so sadly, and at the same time coaxingly.

"Yes, my heart! I see it is no use; but only sleep quietly to-night! To-morrow—to-morrow——"

"No, no; now, at once! He is coming to-morrow," begged she. "Father must think overnight what he will say to him—please, please, Auntie!"

"You are right, my child; it is better at once," said the old woman, and her voice sounded so strangely constrained. "Let me get up! I will go downstairs, but you sleep calmly. To-morrow morning is time enough for you to hear what they say, my darling."

"Oh, heavens! how can I sleep, Auntie?" cried she, springing up, and laid her little trembling hand on the old woman's shoulder.

The latter did not answer; she hastily opened the door and went out. Lieschen followed her into the dim hall, and bent over the banisters. Auntie went

Digitized by Google

down the broad, curving stairs—but how slowly she went! Usually the old feet could trip down so briskly; to-day they scarcely moved. Slowly, slowly, step by step, they went; the stairs creaked under the heavy tread, and her hands clung so tightly to the carved banister. And now the figure vanished from Lieschen's sight; the feet walking so slowly over the stone-floored hall sounded in her ear; and now—now—that was the door of the sitting-room; now she stood before the father and mother.

"Can I hear the conversation up here? What will they say?"

She stood there, breathless, leaning over the railing. She could not hear a sound, except, once or twice, she heard Dorte's voice singing softly to herself, and the rattle of plates and dishes in the kitchen—then all was quiet as before.

But now—that was her father. Is he angry? He spoke so loudly, and now Auntie. Lieschen's heart began to beat violently; she pressed both hands to it. "What if papa does not consent? But that is impossible, purely impossible; it is Army who loves her." That was a confusion of voices down there—now Auntie's voice, which sounded so pacifying, and now the father again; it sounded so plainly, and rang in her ears deafeningly:

"No, no—a thousand times no, I say; and if you all lay on your knees before me. I know what I have to do."

For a moment the large blue eyes looked into space, as if not comprehending; then she flew down the stairs, and in the next moment she stood in the middle of the sitting-room; a glowing blush flew over her face, which

Digitized by Google

was succeeded by deep pallor. "Father!" said she imploringly.

He stood and looked at her; a little blue vein stood out on his broad, white forehead. She knew it well, this token of the greatest excitement in him, and his eyes fairly flashed lightning at her. But Auntie had such a deeply troubled face as she now came up to the young girl. "Come, Liesel; go upstairs!"

"No, Auntie, let me stay. I will know what father says."

"What father says?" his voice rang in her ear. "He says that you are a foolish, stupid thing, who has been allowed too much freedom and her own way too much; but what has been neglected will be made up for now, you may depend upon it!"

"Frederick! Frederick!" begged Auntie.

"Do you believe that you can persuade me?" he burst out. "Until now I have always yielded to your wishes, whatever they were—that we see now. I repeat to you, this time it shall be as I wish."

"That is, I shall not be Army's bride, father?" She suddenly stood close before him, and looked at him fixedly.

"No, my child, for your own good."

"I love him so, father!" She lowered her eyes, and again the glowing blush covered her face.

"You? So! but that is not enough for me. I desire of my future son-in-law that he offer my daughter a whole heart full of love. I will never consent to her being married as a speculation, do you understand?"

"Frederick! Frederick!" cried the old woman, and threw her arm round the young girl, who stood there before her father, as pale as death.

Digitized by Google

"As a speculation?" asked she, and passed her hand over her temples.

"Not another word, Frederick!" The old woman

gave the tall man such an imperative glance that the already opened mouth was silent, and he slowly turned away.

"I do not know what you mean, father," said the young girl softly, and went close up to him. "Perhaps you think that Army does not love me; that is possible; but even if he really does not love me as I love him, that need not be considered. I know that he

Digitized by Google

longs for a heart that understands him—know that life will only have value for him when he——"

"Has paid his debts, my child. Hush your sentimental nonsense. You will be my good, sensible little daughter, who trusts her father with enough experience and knowledge of human nature to know how to act in this case. See, you are excited, and your hand trembles. Go to bed!"

"Auntie!" The young girl turned to the old woman. "Auntie, do you believe that of Army—that he only wishes me for such reasons? You know him better than that, do you not?"

They sounded so calm, so convincing, these words, that tears sprung to the old woman's eyes.

"Come, come, my Liesel!" whispered she. "Father is angry and excited; to-morrow he will be calmer."

"No, no, Auntie; you must tell father what you think. He thinks so much of your opinion."

The old woman stood there in the most painful embarrassment—tears ran over her furrowed cheeks, and her hands pulled at her apron hem.

"You also believe, Auntie——" It sounded like a cry, but there were no tears in Lieschen's eyes yet.

"Father, I know that it is not so; it is not possible—no, it is not possible——"

"I understand your pain, Lieschen," said he, more calmly; "but how can you be so foolish, and believe in a suddenly awakened fancy? You are usually such a sensible, clever girl. See, he has known you a long time, and yet prefers a stranger to you. He never thought of loving you, of marrying you. It was childish play which brought you together formerly, nothing else; and now—now, when he does not know what to

Digitized by Google

do, he remembers the little girl who has money indeed, and desires her hand, in order to save himself; and she is so foolish that she takes this for love. Must I appeal to your maidenly pride, Lieschen?"

She did not answer; her eyes looked at her father with an almost confused expression.

"Nelly's mother was just such a sacrifice, my child! Has she ever seemed enviable to you? Must she not always have seemed to herself boundlessly humiliated opposite her husband, who only looked upon her as a burdensome addition to her wealth? Because he did not love his wife, he led a wild, dissolute life; and when her dowry was squandered, he shot himself—is not that nameless misery? Lieschen, child, and would you ask me to let you plunge into such an abyss? The proud grandmother up there, who already has once fought by every means against an alliance between our house and hers; she who has always been hostile to us—she alone would be a reason for refusing my consent. How would she treat you, even if, forced by necessity, she gave her consent? And how would you bear it without the protection of your husband's love?"

Then Lieschen's clasped hands loosened; she clutched at the table by which she stood; her pale lips moved slightly, as if she wished to speak, but no sound came from them—only the cups on the table rattled from the girl's violent trembling.

"Liesel! For God's sake!" cried Auntie, and put her arm round her, but she freed herself.

"I thank you, father," said she dully; "I—I will obey you." She turned and walked slowly to the door. Everything whirled before her eyes; she heard Auntie's voice, then the door closed behind her. She tottered

Digitized by Google

up the stairs; she must rest heavily upon the banisters; and at last, at last, she was in her little room, and sunk on the low sofa.

Her mother came up and stroked her cheeks, and called her her good, sensible child, who would yet be very happy again. Auntie sat beside her and cried silently, and occasionally a kind word of consolation came from her lips. Lieschen heard all as if at a great distance; only one thing echoed plainly and loudly in her heart: "He does not love me; he only wished me for my earthly possessions—from need." Was it, then, really only a few hours ago that she had stood under the old linden, her head leaning on his breast, and had listened to the words which he whispered to her? Was it not already an eternity, a long eternity; and did not a whole sea of misery and woe lie between then and now?

She groaned, and pressed her hands to her heart. Ah, her short happiness, her sweet dream of love—over, over forever! The blood rushed hotly to her cheeks as she thought how she had so confidentially confessed to him how dearly she loved him. It was wholly indifferent to him, could be perfectly indifferent to him. He did not wish her love, he wished her money. Where could she hide herself so that no one should see her? She closed her eyes and thought: When he comes, and her father refuses his offer. The proud, handsome face, how would it look at that moment? "And then he will go," she thought. She mentally saw him come out of her father's room and cross the hall, his tall figure proudly drawn up. He will not turn and look at her windows. He will go—go, never to return again. She will never see him

Digitized by Google

again—what bitter, harsh words! words which conceal nameless woe!

"Ah, Auntie!" she groaned, in her misery, and the old woman bent down to her.

"Weep yourself out, my heart—weep yourself out. You will feel better after it."

"Ah, if to-morrow were only over!" whispered she.

"The hardest hours pass, if one can only pray."

"I cannot pray, Auntie—I cannot."

And the night passed, and the day dawned on which he was to speak to her father. This morning Lieschen's face wore an unnaturally calm look—only her eyes glowed feverishly. She did her little duties about the house as usual, and then she sat in her room and took a book. Auntie came up and began to talk pleasantly of indifferent things. She listened and answered, and then the old woman went away again to attend to her household duties. The hand of the clock moved steadily on, and now it stood at eleven; all at once a deep blush rose to her face. She had recognized his step in the hall, and now she heard her father's voice. She made a movement as if she would hurry to the door, but then she lowered her eyes to the book again; the leaves trembled beneath her hand. Was it not wrong in her to let him go into a wild life without restraint? She could have saved him from necessity and disgrace; he was her good old playmate, Army, and now there is still time; all may yet be well!

She ran out of the room to the stairs; then she stopped. "Ah, no, she had forgotten — he did not love her; again she must call upon her maidenly pride, which had fled before the old passionate love. How long he stayed with her father! Hark! the door opened—

Digitized by Google

was that Army? She bent over the railing; he just then crossed the hall—she saw his dark hair underneath the cap; how upright he walked! Her heart beat loudly and heavily. The recollection of yesterday overcame her with all its warmth, its bliss; and now, now he seized the door-knob—if it closed again then all was over—forever—beyond help. "Army!" cried she suddenly, and flew down the stairs; but just then the heavy oak door closed, and the knocker rang loudly through the lofty hall. "Army!" she repeated softly,

and stretched out her arms; hot tears rose to her eyes, and slowly she went up to her little room again. Gone beyond help! How desolate the world had become—how boundlessly desolate!

Digitized by Google

XVI.

THE old baroness sat by the fire in her room and waited, in nervous impatience, for the appearance of her grandson. Three times already had Sanna been downstairs to the ladies, and had asked for him; and each time she had returned to her mistress with the message that the lieutenant had not yet returned from his walk.

"God help me!" complained the old lady, and went to the window. "What will become of him? What will become of us? There he goes to walk with the utmost calmness, without thinking of how he can prevent the disaster; he really has not a drop of my blood in his veins—*orribile!*"

The large park, in silent, cold winter splendor, lay before her eyes; the noon sun shone upon the snow-covered trees and lit up the white place before the house dazzlingly. The stillness and solitude of death around her; not a living being far or near! At most, a few hungry birds on the bare branches. And now for years it had been thus solitary and deserted around the old castle. Involuntarily she shuddered as to-day it again struck fearfully upon her heart. "Why then?" she asked herself. She was accustomed to live so forgotten. Was it because, in the last few days, she had thought so much of the long past—gay, pleasure-filled times? Or was it because she had so trusted that there

Digitized by Google

would again be brilliant, rich life here, whose central point she would be? And now must she continue to exist in the same inconsolable manner—perhaps even worse, if the Duke of B—— did not fulfil her wish? But no, that was impossible; he will do it—he must. She needed money. "Oh, heavens, if he does not!" She clinched her delicate hands. "Oh, that serpent, that Blanche!" whispered she, and her large eyes flashed moodily. Her features did not clear when, at this moment, the red curtains parted and Army entered the room.

"Are you really back from your walk, already?" asked she ironically.

"I have not been for a walk," replied he, apparently calmly; but the old lady had noticed the deeply excited sound of his voice. She rested her eyes penetratingly upon him.

"Not? Where were you, then? I have already asked for you three or four times. In any case, a conversation between us is more necessary than what you have been doing. But it is never otherwise. You possess your mother's character; you are intolerably indolent."

"On the contrary, grandmamma, I have just tried to follow one of your counsels. Unfortunately, the experiment failed completely." He passed his handkerchief over his heated face and threw his cap on the nearest table.

"What?" said she. "I do not understand—one of my counsels?"

"Certainly. I wished—I have just tried to make a wealthy marriage; but, as I said——"

The baroness took a step back and stared at him.

"You are astonished, grandmamma. That is natural.

Digitized by Google

I wondered myself, this morning, that the thought had never occurred to you. Now, to be sure, I suspect that nothing could be further from your thoughts than a marriage between me and Lieschen Erving."

"I think you are mad, Army."

"Why, then? Good heavens! you yourself advised me to save myself by a wealthy marriage, and she is wealthy enough, the little one—nothing else is required, in your opinion."

"I will never consent," cried the old lady, beside herself. "Is it possible to conceive such an idea? This unbearable creature—your wife? It is fairly shocking."

"I already told you, grandmamma, that the experiment did not succeed," said he calmly. His face had suddenly become pale; he threw back his head, and one hand played with his black moustache. "I was refused, grandmamma—a plain, honest refusal—but now I must ask you not to speak of indolence again." It sounded careless the way he uttered these words; and yet a deeply wounded self-respect trembled therein.

"A refusal?" asked she, surprised and incredulous. "A refusal, did you say, Army?"

"Yes, indeed. Mr. Erving first declared to me that he demanded for his child a husband who loved her; he did not wish to know that she was considered as a burdensome addition to her money. That was plain, was it not? I cannot be vexed with the man. I seemed to myself, as I stood there before him, more devilishly despicable than ever before in my life."

The grandmother turned her back to him, shrugging her shoulders. "Ideal phrases," said she. "Among a thousand marriages, scarcely one is concluded from

Digitized by Google

other reasons. I must confess, frankly, I am surprised that Mr.—Mr. Erving gave you such a decision. This kind of people gladly pay three times your debts if by that their daughter becomes Madame la Baronesse. There certainly must be some hidden reason." She seated herself in her arm-chair by the fire, and tried to gaze indifferently into the flames.

"You are quite right, grandmamma—there is some other hidden reason. I indeed told her father that I would try, honestly try, to cherish, protect, and guard Lieschen, as only a husband could; and that was no lie, but my honest intention."

"Really?" asked she ironically.

He flushed deeply "Really!" he replied. "Or do you, perhaps, think that I would let the girl who confidingly gave me her hand feel that it was not love which led me to her? Above all things, when such a warm, childishly pure heart was given to me as hers?"

"Oh, listen! When did you make such studies of the heart?"

"You forget, grandmamma, that we grew up together, and that of late I have often enough had opportunity to see her—she took care of mamma for weeks in the autumn——"

"Have you perhaps fallen in love with the pitying sister? In truth, the Germans find a woman never more charming and bewitching than in the nursery or at the sick-bed. In any case, it was new for you, and quite a piquant contrast to Blanche."

The young man's forehead contracted gloomily. "I beg you, grandmamma, leave that subject," said he; "it is perfectly useless to draw comparisons here; but—we have quite left the thread of our conversation. You

Digitized by Google

said there was some particular reason why I did not receive Lieschen's hand. Now, then, this particular reason—you will excuse me for speaking so abruptly—

these particular reasons are the experiences which they once had down there in the mill in a similar affair—bitter, hard experiences, which banished happiness for a long time from the old house. I shall endeavor to bring light upon this affair."

The young officer had spoken the last words loudly and plainly, and his eyes were fixed upon the proud face opposite him. It seemed to him that it paled a shade, but not a feature changed.

"It is of no importance what reasons induced the miller to refuse you," was the sharp answer. "I do

Digitized by Google

not know his family chronicle, and any reason is welcome to me, for I should now, once and for all, never give my consent to this insane project."

"Then I should have been forced to marry without it," said he calmly. "You understand that one does not play with such things. I gave the girl my word; she gave me her consent; and that is enough. It would then only be otherwise if she had herself refused. But I am convinced that I would still have obtained her hand had not those unfortunate occurrences stood between. The parents would not let their child enter the house in which resides their old enemy—you, grandmamma!"

"I!" The baroness sprung angrily up. "Absurd!" said she then, and sunk back into her arm-chair again. "The people are in the highest degree indifferent to me. Until to-day——"

"You cannot bear the girl," he insisted.

"No; because I consider it highly unsuitable for her to associate with Nelly as her equal."

For a while there was silence in the room. The old lady breathed as if relieved. The anxious expression which during her grandson's last speeches her face had worn disappeared and she glanced over at him quite pleasantly.

"I wished to speak with you, Army," said she at last. "We must consider together. I have written to the duke, and am convinced that the money will come. I am obliged to keep a part of it for myself; the rest is for you. Let us hope that it will suffice to satisfy the worst creditors. But what then? And, above all things, what if the assistance, contrary to all expectation, should be withheld?"

Digitized by Google

He did not at once answer. The frown upon his forehead had grown deeper. "I do not believe in the duke's readiness," said he, then, gloomily; "and even so, it is but a drop on a hot stone. What shall I do? Nothing else remains for me but—America."

Then he suddenly felt his shoulder clutched, and the deathly pale face of his mother bent over him. "Army!" asked she breathlessly, "what did you say? You wish to go away?"

He started, and seized her hand; he wished to soothe her, but the terrified, tearful eyes rested so piercingly upon his face—he let the hand fall and turned away.

"Cornelia, you know that I cannot bear these inaudible, sudden entrances," scolded the old lady; but the other did not hear her—her heart almost stopped at the fearful word, America.

"Almighty God! Is there, then, no one who can help us? Army, I shall die if you go away!" pleaded she, and held out her clasped hands to him. "That is the last—the worst."

"Do not cry, do not worry yourself, mamma!" said he, without looking at her. "I—I will stay——"

"No, no; I know what you will do," cried she. "You will go away secretly, without taking leave. One morning I will awaken and no longer have a son. Army, can you do that? Can you go away, when you know you will never see me again?" The grief was piercing and heart-rending in these words.

"It would not be forever," said he, hesitatingly "I woud come back again some day; we would write to each other; it——"

She let her arms sink. "I should have tortured my-

Digitized by Google

self to death meanwhile," whispered she, and two large tears rolled over her cheeks.

The old lady rose and walked impatiently through the room. Army remained motionless. "Mamma," begged the pale woman, and clutched her mother-in-law's hands, "have you, then, no counsel? Is there no other way? Do not let him go; I cannot bear it!"

The young man suddenly passed his hand through his hair with a violent gesture. "Confound it!" cried he; "I beg you, mamma, do not make the matter still worse by your complaints. Pray consider. I have enormous debts—that is one fact. Pay them, I cannot—that is the other fact. I have tried everything possible to find an outlet—it was in vain. The affairs are to come up for protest at New Year's; there are promissory notes among them. I am sure of being arrested—I can no longer remain in the service—what else is left me? Do you think it is a pleasant thought? Certainly not. But, as I said, do not cry and complain. The little bit of miserable life is really not worth a tear." He walked hastily out of the room, and slammed the door behind him.

For a moment he hesitated; it seemed to him that he heard a scream from his mother; then walking on, he drew a letter from the pocket of his uniform, and opened it. "It is true; the game is up!" whispered he, scanning the lines. He went to his room and threw himself in a chair before the fire.

This morning a ray of hope had once more beamed upon him—Lieschen. The words which yesterday evening had been whispered so softly in his ear under the old snow-laden linden had sounded to him like a message of peace after the last stormy weeks. They

Digitized by Google

were such simple, childlike, pure words, which came from a happy, rejoicing, girlish heart. The sweet, shy words of his old playmate had seemed to him like the perfume of violets. That was real, true love which bloomed for him there. And he had vowed to be worthy of this love, to begin a new life at her side, with fresh courage, with firm, honest intentions—yes, by heaven! he had had this intention, and now—he laughed mockingly. "True love? No; there was none. She

obeyed her father so willngly to-day when he told her, "You will be unhappy; give him up!" No; the much-praised great love of a woman's heart, which follows without wavering, through misfortune and unhappiness, is a saying—a long forgotten fairy tale. One just like the other—faint-hearted, vain creatures! But he could scarcely reproach her. Her father had told her, "He only loves your money." That was already sufficient; and then? What was that about grandmamma?

Digitized by Google

Baron Fritz and Lisette—Mr. Erving had mentioned them this morning when he spoke of the chief reasons for his refusal. God only knew what might have happened. He had been so cautious in his remarks. But, bah!—nothing can be changed now. How soon they will say at his garrison: "Lieutenant von Derenberg has gone across the water—debts, naturally; loads of debts. It is in the family; the father also shot himself. That happens every day—scarcely worth the trouble of speaking of it."

Every day, in truth! His mother's pale, tortured face rose before his eyes. He should have been a support to her—yes, she would die if he went. And Nelly, poor little thing!—her lovely dark eyes looked at him—how they would weep and mourn for him! And if she remained wholly alone—if one day, in a strange land, he opened a letter which told him that his mother's eyes had closed forever, and he had not stood beside her bed, and not received the last glance—had not heard the last word, which would perhaps have been pardon for him? He sprung up quickly and unbuttoned his coat; he stopped in the middle of the room and stared at the wall. There had hung the picture of the beautiful Agnes Mechthilde, which he had brought from the ancestral hall, because it looked so like her. He had taken it down at that time when she broke her word to him. It still leaned there, with its face to the wall.

He went over and raised it, and hung it in its place. The wonderful face, with the deep, sad eyes, looked down at him again, so confidingly, so irresistibly attractive—he placed himself before it, with crossed arms, and gazed at it long. It was its fault, this red-

Digitized by Google

dish gold luxuriant hair, that he had become what he now was, through a foolish, unhappy passion. For a moment a wild longing overcame him. Would she have a glance of pity when she learned how far things had come with him? He laughed quite loudly. No; those cold, sparkling eyes could not look mild like these. The picture was not like her—not at all; only the hair. A bitter, scornful expression settled about his mouth. "Are they without maliciousness?" murmured he; "without maliciousness—not one; no, not one!"

He did not hear how the door of his room was opened softly, hesitatingly; he did not see a girl's pale face, with great, frightened eyes, look in; a slender form softly and hesitatingly approach him. She stood still in the middle of the room; her eyes rested, almost as if frightened, upon the golden-haired woman's face there in the picture, which the young man still gazed at fixedly; involuntarily she made a movement, as if she would flee—then he turned.

"Lieschen!" stammmered he; "Lieschen, you——"

She did not answer; she only stared at him, while the dark blush on her face yielded to a deep pallor.

"What do you want, Lieschen?" said he. "Are you looking for Nelly? She—I do not know whether——"

"No," answered she; "I came to you."

"To me?" asked he softly.

"Yes, I—fear drove me, Army. Your mother was at our house, and said you wished—oh, do not go away, Army; do not go away! I cannot bear it." The last was like a scream; she clasped her hands before her glowing face.

"You ask me, Lieschen, and yet you let me go this morning?" said he, bitterly.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, I was so wretched when you went, Army—so wretched; but much more—a thousand times more—it pains me that you do not love me, that you only wish——"

"Your father told you that, Lieschen!"

"Yes! And is it not true, Army? And even if I had doubted, when your mother came to our house to ask father's help, so that you need not go out into the wide world, then it must become clear to me—I must

believe, however my heart fought against it with all its strength."

"She begged of your father for me?" said he loudly and angrily, and stepped closer to her. "That is too much."

Digitized by Google

"She loves you so, Army, and she did not know that you—that I—that father——" She paused, and looked anxiously and pleadingly at him. "Do not go away, Army; do not go away!" again pleaded the pale little mouth. "It must be terribly lonely out in the great, strange world, where no one loves you. I ran away from the house when I heard your mother speak the terrible word, 'America.' In blind haste, with the secret, dreadful fear that I could no longer find you, I wanted to ask you once more, by all that is dear and precious to you in life—for your mother's, your sister's, sake, Army—do not go——"

There she stood before him, so charming in the simple, dark blue woolen dress, her lashes deeply lowered in maidenly confusion, her chest heaving convulsively with anxiety for him, with excitement at the step she had taken; one long braid had been loosened by the hurried running, and hung over her shoulder; she did not notice it; she stretched her trembling hands, tightly clasped together, out to him in supplication, and he dared not seize them.

That was it, personified in the loveliest form, the great, all-vanquishing love of a woman's heart, which he had just doubted!

"Do not be proud, Army!" came at last from her lips; "for your mother—and—for my sake. I would be miserable all my life with the consciousness of not having saved you. We will be comrades—good comrades—as formerly, Army——"

There was a long pause; he had turned away his face, and looked at the floor, his arms tightly folded. She looked at him questioningly, but gradually a dark, glowing blush rushed over her face; her clasped hands

Digitized by Google

loosened, and a couple of great tears fell from beneath her lashes; a feeling of burning shame rose, hot and suffocatingly, in her breast; she turned and went toward the door. Then she heard steps outside—hasty, well-

known steps. Anxiously her large eyes wandered round the room, and rested on him; she stood there irresolute. "Auntie!" whispered she. "She is coming to look for me."

But at the same moment Army stood near her, and drew her protectingly to him; confused and anxious, she rested her head on his shoulder. She thought he must hear her heart's loud beating. Now the door was opened; involuntarily she leaned closer against him,

Digitized by Google

each moment expecting to hear a well-known voice angrily and reproachfully addressing her. But all was silence; the old woman there on the threshold stood motionless, only her eyes rested in painful astonishment upon the picture before her; there in the lofty, half dark room, just under the large chandelier of deer antlers, stood a young couple. He had his arm round the slender figure, he held her close to him, and looked gloomily at the old woman, as if he were angry at the disturbance—so they stood, a picture of the sweetest happiness.

"So, then! So, then! There is no remedy for love and death." She had suspected it when Lieschen so quickly left the house; she had hurried after her—but who, at sixty-five, can run like a young, light-footed thing; and she came too late! too late! "The poor child had run with open arms into unhappiness!"

"Lieschen!" said she reproachfully.

And then she looked up and freed herself from his arms.

"Ah, do not scold," she begged softly. "I could not help it, Auntie," and stretched out her hands to her. She tried to smile, but she did not succeed—the tears rushed to her eyes; she threw her arms passionately round the old woman's neck, and, with sobs, she repeated: "I could not help it; indeed, Auntie, I could not help it!"

Digitized by Google

XVII.

THE following day brought bad weather; it thawed, and the brilliant snow covering suddenly disappeared; the brown branches of the trees stretched out, bare and wet, against the gray sky; and, besides, there was a wild wind raging, which made the elms by the mill stream bend and tremble.

There was an oppressed feeling in the mill; the girls in the kitchen spoke softly together; and the coachman, who had joined them there, scratched his ear with a very significant expression. From the sitting-room was heard the master's voice. The young baron was with him. Yesterday he had been there once, and since then Lieschen had looked as pale as the plaster on the wall. Something must be wrong; that was plain as day, and Auntie's face was as sour as vinegar—and now the master!

Now the sitting-room door opened, and the old woman crossed the hall and went upstairs, as Dorte, who peeped through the crack of the door, remarked:

"Depend upon it, Minnie, our young lady has carried her point," whispered she. "Auntie has gone to bring her down. Well, why not? He is a handsome man, and a distinguished one, and they always loved each other, even when he came home on vacation as a cadet."

Peter rubbed his ear again.

Digitized by Google

"Well, then," said he, "if I were the master I would say no, because of the old woman in the castle."

"'Sh!" whispered Dorte; "really, she is coming down the stairs. Now they are going into the sitting-room. Hurrah! a betrothal feast! That will be fun!"

In the next minute she stood at the kitchen table, busy with her cups and plates, for Auntie approached the kitchen, and immediately after she entered. The old face wore an anxious expression, and the eyes looked as if they had shed many tears—so, at least, thought the girls. For a moment she stood as if lost in thought; then she unfastened the bunch of keys from her side and went to the dining-room.

"Glasses, Dora!" said she, as she came out with several bottles of wine; "and put on a clean white apron when you bring them in."

She placed the bottles on the kitchen table, and, wiping her eyes, went out again.

"Gracious!" cried the girl, as she returned from the sitting-room and set the tray down on the table with a bang. "Is that a betrothal? The whole company look as if they were at a funeral. The master bites his lips, as if to keep from crying; the mistress weeps as if Liesel were dead; and Auntie, too; the baron stands near our young lady like a stick—just like a stick. I saw him kiss her hand, as if a regular, ordinary kiss did not belong to an engagement; and our Liesel looks—well, may God pity us, if that is a happy bride!"

After perhaps half an hour a young couple crossed the threshold of the old house; Auntie stood at the window and looked after them, and under the linden a pale little face glanced back once more at the windows; there was none of that sweet, radiant happiness—none

Digitized by Google

of that shy, budding rapture of a childish, young betrothed in the glance; her mouth wore a harsh, pained expression, and the eyes looked out from beneath the long lashes in deepest woe. Her *fiancé* had taken her arm and drawn it through his; so they walked on, and the veil of the fur cap which the girl wore floated in the wind. Neither of them spoke a word. Then, when they came to the old linden, Lieschen's hand trembled slightly, and for a moment a deep flush suffused her face.

"You are tired, Lieschen? I walked too quickly."

"Oh, no; but I—I am so afraid of your grandmother."

He bit his lips, but was silent. He himself was in no pleasant frame of mind, and he knew his grandmother well enough to be certain that she was capable of an inconsiderate action. Again they walked on, and now they turned into the linden walk; the wind howled through the long row of trees, and blew the branches together with a creak; and the high portal, with the old sandstone bears, looked damp and moist. Involuntarily the young girl's eyes rested upon the imposing entrance.

"What does that mean?" asked she suddenly, and pointed to the motto of the coat of arms.

"*Nunquam retrorsam!*—Never retreat!" replied he.

"That is good," said she, drawing a deep breath, and quickening her pace.

And now they stood before the tower door; for a moment something of weakness overcame her. "Can I bear it if she insults me?" she asked herself, and a nameless dread of the proud grandmother seemed to almost suffocate her; she felt as if she must turn and

Digitized by Google

flee, now—before it was too late; she felt helpless, unprotected; for he—he did not love her.

"Lieschen!" said a clear voice joyfully, and bursting into tears, Nelly threw her arms round her neck. "Lieschen! Sister Lieschen!"

She endured the kisses; something like a ray of sunshine came to her face; and up there, on the threshold of the cosy sitting-room, a pair of arms were stretched out to her, and embraced her more and more closely; and tender, loving words sounded in her ear.

"My dear mother," whispered she, and bent over the small hand. "I will indeed always be an obedient daughter to you, and—and a faithful wife to Army." The last was very soft and hesitating.

Now they stood in the lofty room again, which two days before she had left a gay, happy girl; now she stood beside him, his betrothed. And in this short space of time the young heart had experienced the highest happiness, only immediately after to tremble in the deepest misery. There sat the mother of her *fiancé*, and her tear-dimmed eyes rested so compassionately upon her son's betrothed. She indeed knew why he desired her hand—it had been just thus with her. Only Nelly was unconstrained; she believed in his love for her friend. Ah, if she only could also, this belief was so sweet, so wonderful.

"Excuse me a moment, Lieschen. I will announce our visit to grandmamma," said Army.

She nodded her head in assent, and he went, only to return immediately, in silence. Her heart beat stormily; involuntarily she folded her hands, while she blushed and paled in sudden change; and all at once all that the proud woman had done to her seemed written on her

Digitized by Google

mind in letters of flame; and then a lovely image rose before her eyes—Great-aunt Lisette, and an early grave in the churchyard yonder.

"Madame the Baroness regrets that she has a headache, and cannot receive any one to-day," Sanna's voice startled the young girl from her feverish train of thought.

"Then I request her to appoint an hour for to-morrow when I may pay her a visit with my betrothed." It sounded apparently calm, and yet Army's eyes sparkled threateningly at the old woman, whose glance rested upon the young girl almost with hatred. The latter had involuntarily drawn herself up, and Nelly grasped her hand and stroked her cheeks.

"Mamma!" began Army, and sat down beside his betrothed, "my father-in-law requests an interview with you; and it would be very pleasant if you and Nelly would come to the mill this evening and celebrate our——"

"Certainly, Army—certainly! I would have gone with Nelly before to-day if the weather had permitted."

"The baroness cannot fix a time, but requests the lieutenant to come to her for a moment this evening," was the message which the old servant now brought.

"I am sorry, Sanna, I am, naturally, not at liberty this evening, as we will celebrate our betrothal down in the mill—do you hear, Sanna, down in the mill! I am furthermore sorry, Sanna, that the baroness has a headache, and we therefore must be deprived of her presence at the celebration. We, the betrothed couple, present our compliments, and hope that she may soon be better."

"*Si, signor,*" hissed the old woman, and disappeared.

Digitized by Google

There was silence; Army walked up and down the room; his mother had drawn the young girl down beside her on the sofa, and held her hands tightly in hers. Ah, heavens! it was fearfully hard—the consciousness of her oppressive position suddenly overcame her with all its force; she thought she would die. And now, when her father learned that her *fiancé's* grandmother would not see her—and Auntie! Still, she had wished nothing better; she would never complain—she had promised. Yes; if at least he had loved her, then——

"I must go home," said she, rising; she felt strangely oppressed.

"Why in such a hurry?" asked Army.

"I—I should like to tell them at home that mamma and Nelly are coming," stammered she. He took his cap, without further remark.

"Please remain here!" she begged anxiously. "I can go alone perfectly well. Please come afterwards, with your mother!"

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Good-bye, mamma, *au revoir;* good-by, Nelly!" cried he, while Lieschen, drawing down her veil, gave him her hand with averted face.

The storm still raged outside, and they walked on silently, side by side. The wind pulled at the clothes of the young girl, and made her shiver with the cold.

"You are too lightly wrapped up," said Army, and took off his coat to lay over her shoulders.

"No; I am not at all cold—really; thank you!" He hung the coat over his arm, and walked on beside her.

"The path is almost impassable," he began, after a while; "besides, we must soon come to the place where the mill stream has somewhat overflowed its

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

banks. Wait; here we are already. I must see whether a path does not lead through the bushes over there."

The young girl obediently stood still; in the gray twilight she saw his slender figure walking along in search on the other side of the path; then he came back.

"We cannot pass; the water is almost a foot deep on both sides. I will carry you over."

"No!" cried she, drawing back; "never!"

"Why not?"

"Because I do not wish you to trouble yourself in the slightest on my account. Wet feet will not hurt me—certainly not. We will be at the house immediately."

He did not answer, and the darkness concealed his flaming blush, but she felt herself immediately lifted up by strong arms and carried across.

"Pardon!" sounded coldly and bitterly in her ear when again they stood on firm ground. "A lady cannot possibly pass this place without assistance."

The rest of the distance was finished in silence. When they entered the hall the curious faces of the girls in the kitchen peeped out, and Auntie came to meet them. "What a storm!" said she pleasantly, and opened the door of the sitting-room.

"Good evening, Auntie!" said Army, and tried to take her hand, but the old woman drew it back with perceptible haste.

"Go in there, Sir Baron!" said she coldly. "Lieschen will come after you in a moment. I first have something to tell her, and you have so many things to discuss with your father-in-law." She drew the young girl away by the hand into her little room.

"We are to have guests, Auntie," said she. "Peter must fetch Army's mother and Nelly in the carriage."

Digitized by Google

"Very good; I will see to it."

The old woman went out, and when she came back again the flickering light of the lamp which she carried fell on a very tearful face which the twilight had before concealed.

"You have been crying, Auntie?" asked Lieschen, and bent down to her.

"Well, yes, child; that happens so. Never mind. I wished to say a few words to you this evening, because it is your betrothal day." She placed the lamp on the table, and went up to the young girl. "See, Lieschen. I always thought this day would be happier, and thought you would be a less pale betrothed. It is your wish, child; you say, too, that you are happy, and begged your parents' consent on your knees; but me, Lieschen—me you cannot deceive. I know very well how your poor little heart feels, and it makes me so very miserable. I could almost die with heartache."

She turned round and went to the bureau, straightened the cover, and pushed the cushion here and there; and with that the tears overflowed her eyes, and fell on her old hands. Lieschen still stood silent in the middle of the room.

"You are so quiet, child, and so rigid," said the old woman, and dried her eyes. "It worries me so. Speak my dearest, You will feel better for it."

"What shall I say, then, Auntie? I have nothing that I care to speak of," replied she.

"Come here to me, Liesel," begged the old woman, and drew the slender form to her. "Promise me one thing! If he should ever forget what you have done for him, if he is ever unkind to you, and I am still alive,

Digitized by Google

child, then come to me. Then I will talk to him, and he will not try it a second time."

She only smiled. "Please do not worry yourself, Auntie!"

"And the old baroness, child, have you spoken to her?"

"No, Auntie. I think she will not see me."

The old woman started up angrily, and for a moment

her good face looked indescribably bitter; she had a harsh speech on her lips, but a glance at the pale girl before her made her silent. "Dear Heaven!" she only murmured; "and all this without love!" And again her eyes filled with tears.

Just then a carriage rolled heavily over the bridge. It was to fetch the ladies from the castle; but at the

Digitized by Google

same time the house door was opened, loud talking was heard, and then Dora's exclamation of pity.

"Oh, merciful heavens! Oh!"

"That was certainly old Thomas from the parsonage," said Auntie, and opened the door. Right; there stood the bent old man, and the cap which he held in his hand dripped with rain, and Dora cried out to Auntie:

"Ah! only listen; the pastor's little Karl is dead. Oh, how sorry I am!"

"Karl?" asked Lieschen, and suddenly stood close to the old messenger. "Karl?"

"Yes, miss; he fell asleep at six o'clock. Oh, Miss Liesel, the poor mother and father! He was such a fine boy. You do not know how miserable they are down there."

The young girl was still in hat and coat. Without considering, she walked to the front door.

"Where are you going, child? Child, in this storm?"

"I am going to Uncle Pastor, Auntie; let me, please!"

And already she stood outside in the raging storm, and fought against the wind to go forward. The old woman's call was drowned by the storm, and the branches of the elms, by the rushing mill stream, bent above her in wild combat. Then a carriage came to meet her; she stepped aside and let it pass, and then she walked on all the more quickly. It seemed a good thing, this storm, to her; it was a torment to sit beside him in the protected room; it looked like a picture of the sweetest happiness, and yet there was not a shadow of it. He did not love her; he only desired her on account of her money! The feeling of joyous self-sacrifice with which she had offered him her hand disap-

Digitized by Google

peared before the humiliations she suffered; and what did he who had accepted the sacrifice do to sweeten the humiliations? Was it, then, so hard to be her good comrade?

How wildly the wind shook the branches of the old linden, and how quickly the clouds chased each other across the dark heavens! And down there in the village, in the parsonage, tears were shed—bitter, hot tears. If one could only weep also! But she this would not; she did not wish people to look at her compassionately, father and mother and Auntie, even Dorte and Minnie—no, that was terrible; that she could not bear.

Did not hasty steps sound behind her? Yes; and now the call: "Lieschen! Lieschen!" She stood still; that was surely his voice. If she could now go to meet him, and cling to his arm, if he said, "I was worried about you, so I came." But no; her father had certainly sent him after her, or he would perhaps have followed every other one; for a lady cannot possibly walk alone in this storm.

"But, Lieschen, I beg of you!" now sounded his voice; "how can you go out in such weather? Your parents are worried half to death about you. Here is Auntie's shawl; and wait, the carriage will come immediately. I told them to send it after you without delay. Are you still the little foolish Liesel, whose kind heart flames up at the misfortune of strangers?" he asked, wrapping the shawl round her.

She smiled bitterly. "The pastor and his family are no strangers for me. They belong, indeed, to our family."

He did not reply to the harsh tone; and now the carriage came up and stopped close before them.

Digitized by Google

"May I accompany you?" asked he, helping her to get in; "or do you prefer to go alone?"

She wished to assent to the latter, but then her eyes fell on him. He was in his uniform, without overcoat.

"I do not wish you to get cold on my account," said she dully. "Pray get in!"

After a short drive the carriage stopped; Lieschen hurriedly got out and went into the parsonage; it was dark in the hall, and quiet all around. She knocked at the door of the sitting-room. It echoed back strangely, loudly, but no friendly "Come in!" was heard. An inexplicable terror overcame her, here in the house of death, but courageously she groped her way forward. There were the stairs; and now, here to the right, the study. She knocked softly—again no answer; but light shone through the crack. She opened the door, and peeped in; there sat Uncle Pastor at the table, his face hidden in his hands, and before him lay the opened Bible.

"Uncle Pastor! Uncle Pastor!" cried she, sobbing, and hid her head on his shoulder.

"Liesel, you good child! Yes, trouble has come heavily upon us," said he gravely, and stroked her damp, brown braids. "And you came here in the storm? How kind that was of you! Our Karl, Lieschen—our wild, pretty fellow—oh, it is hard not to murmur against God. My poor Rosine! He was her pride."

"Oh, uncle, uncle!" sobbed she, in deep misery; "how sad life is! How hard!"

"Yes, it is hard," now said the little wife, who had come in; "it is very hard." And a stream of hot tears burst from her eyes, already red from weeping. "You

Digitized by Google

should not have come, dear child; it excites you; and you might be ill."

"May I not see Karl once? Please, aunt!" said she, still sobbing.

And in the adjoining room lay a pale, boyish face

on the snow-white pillow. She went softly up and looked at the dear, well-known features. How often had the mouth there said, "Aunt Lieschen" to her! How often the large eyes looked at her laughingly, and now so quiet, so silent! The little mother pressed her face again to the pillows of the small bed; and the father stood at the other side and looked at what was left to him of his proudest dreams for the future. But Lieschen's tears ceased to flow; there was such wonderful peace on the child's face before her. How lovely it

Digitized by Google

must be to sleep so sweetly, with such a happy smile, and without having to experience the misery of life!

"Do not cry, aunt! He sleeps so peacefully, he looks so happy!" Then she slowly turned to go.

She stood still in the little room. "Uncle," said she softly, and laid her little hand on his arm, "may I come to you with a question at this hour?"

"At any time; now also, my Lieschen! Do I suspect rightly when I think that it is about you and Army? Something of that has come to my ears to-day."

"Yes, uncle; and I cannot go away without your telling me how I must act." She seated herself on the little sofa. "Father refused his consent," she continued, "and Auntie said a marriage with Army would be my misfortune, uncle, because he does not think of me, but only of my money; and father appealed to my maidenly pride. At first I obeyed him; it was such a dreadful feeling to learn that; I wished to be strong, also, uncle; but then—then his mother came, and was so grieved. He wished to go away to America; and then, uncle, something drove me to him, and I begged him not to go away. I was half crazy with grief and fear. He should look upon me as a good comrade, I said to him. And then father consented, because I begged him so. I went on my knees to him, uncle—I should have died if Army had been forced to go away to America and I had not tried everything to save him. Army does not know what fights it has cost; and now it is so very hard for me when I stand near him. At every step at his side my heart aches, and then my pride rises that I am really his betrothed, but an unloved one. Ah, uncle, I am so unhappy!"

Digitized by Google

She burst into tears, and hid her head in the pillow of the sofa.

"Dear child," said the clergyman, and softly stroked her thick hair; "you believed it would be easier to deny yourself. Ah, no—that brings more thorns than roses. A proverb from my Rosine's album occurs to me—her old grandmother wrote it in the book when she, a young girl, went from her father's house as governess among strangers to earn her living—'If you are ever in conflict with your feelings, my beloved child, and vexation and wounded vanity fight with an inclination to pardon, to love, let love triumph, even at the price of seeming humiliated.' The loveliest, the most beautiful, thing which a woman can do is to love, always to love, although she is injured. Have patience, child," he added, as the girl looked up at him with eyes filled with tears; "he has just experienced a bitter disappointment; and the consciousness of taking a step which is not regarded favorably on either side may be tormenting enough to him. He will overcome that. Consider that not only his extremely distressing position has led him to you, but the true need of a heart full of love. I have never discovered an ignoble trait in his character. For the present he will esteem you highly—he will be thankful to you for having saved him from necessity and disgrace; and later, my child, perhaps before you have thought, you will discover a little spark of love for you in his heart, which, with humility and care, with never weary friendliness, cherished and guarded, will some day kindle to a bright flame. But be careful that you do not quench the weak spark by irritability. Treat him like a sick child!"

Lieschen had risen.

Digitized by Google

"I thank you, uncle," said she softly; "and you will soothe my parents, will you not, and tell them that I may yet be happy—and Auntie? I will be pleasant and considerate to Army, and will fight with my irritation. But, uncle, only tell me once more, was it wrong of me not to be guided by my father? See, he thought I did not love him, or else I would not grieve him by insisting upon having my will; and Auntie cries all the time. Ah, uncle, make my father look at me pleasantly again."

"It is hard for him, child, to give up his fears. You are his only daughter, and he is anxious about you. It was his duty to warn you, to throw a bright light upon the path which you wish to take; you enter into such confused circumstances in a wholly different sphere. Do not reproach him if he frowns; and just as little Auntie. The old woman loves you so dearly. But she will look happy again if she sees you contented at Army's side, and that lies in your power. You love him, you say, and, you know, 'Love suffereth all things, endureth all things, hopeth all things.'"

"I thank you once more, uncle," repeated she. "You always find the right word. I was on the road to being cold and irritable to him. I will do differently now. Good-by, I will come again to-morrow; and do not weep, uncle — Karl has been spared so much pain."

Slowly she went down the stairs; the carriage had turned, and waited before the house-door; Army stood beside it and waited; he helped her in, and seated himself beside her; and again they drove silently on through the night.

"Army," said she suddenly, and laid her hand on

Digitized by Google

his shoulder, "I was very out of temper and unpleasant. Forgive me; I just come from the house of death——"

He took her hand in his, and turned towards her

"I have a request to make of you," she continued, before he could answer. "You know my father only gave his consent with a heavy heart to our betrothal. He is afraid I may not be happy. Forgive him, Army. I am his only child; help me to drive the clouds from his forehead, and try a little to act as if you loved me,

as if you were happy. I will also—I am indeed," she added softly. "Do not be angry; but mother might wonder, and Auntie, and I would so like them to look pleasantly at us, and not worried——"

Digitized by Google

He did not answer.

"Will you, Army?" she asked hesitatingly.

Already the carriage rolled over the mill bridge and past the business house; it drove round the bare lindens, and now stopped before the house door. Lieschen looked intently at him, and he had turned his head away and looked out of the window. Dorte just then came from the door with a lantern, and opened the carriage door; he sprung out and offered Lieschen his hand to assist her; an expression of the deepest emotion was on his face. So he must act as if he loved her? How sad this request was! And if he now said to her, "Why feign it? I love you really, with your pure heart, your lovely womanliness—with you alone can I be happy, you alone give me back my peace!" would she believe it? But that was the wretchedness of it—he had lost her confidence.

He looked at her; he wished to answer—what? Yes; that he did not know himself. And then, in the uncertain light of the lantern, a charming head leaned out of the carriage; the little fur cap was somewhat on one side upon the thick, brown braids; the little oval face was still flushed with tears; the delicate mouth wore a slight, shy smile—a forced smile, but still it caused two charming little dimples in her cheeks; but the eyes which looked into his as if imploring an answer made him draw back quite startled. He knew them—those eyes—they looked at him so dreamily, so steeped in misery, as if they sought a lost happiness. Almost stormily he drew her to him, and looked into the great stars.

The carriage had driven away, and Dora ran out of the storm into the protecting hall. It had grown dark around the two young people outside; he wished to

Digitized by Google

speak, but his lips closed again. "She would not believe you," he said to himself, and she did not venture to ask him again, as he slowly released her hands from his. "He will not lie," she thought, and crossed the old threshold. "He will promise nothing that he cannot keep—he does not love me at all!"

Digitized by Google

XVIII.

"And you say, Henry, that my grandmother saw the two together?"

"Fanny told me so, lieutenant, the evening before she disappeared."

The young officer sat in one of the large arm-chairs of his room, and looked intently, and with great interest, at the old man, who stood respectfully not far from him, and whose features betrayed a slight embarrassment. Army had sent for him at a late hour; he wished to know what motives guided his grandmother, and in what her hatred was rooted, which had again been displayed to-day in his contemptuous treatment of his betrothed. He wished to hear from an impartial mouth at what his future father-in-law's insinuations were directed; and the old man had indeed, upon his questioning him, begun hesitatingly and with embarrassment to tell of Baron Fritz, who loved so dearly the beautiful Lisette down in the mill.

"At that time," continued the old man, "the Baron Fritz came riding home one evening, so very jovial. I took off his overcoat, for it was cold, and then I unlocked the little tower room for him, and lit a fire in the fireplace——"

"The little tower room?" the young officer interrupted the narrator hastily.

"Yes, lieutenant; Baron Fritz always occupied that room. I know why, too—from up there he could see

Digitized by Google

his sweetheart's windows—and I lit a fire, fetched him a bottle of Madeira, and helped him change his clothes; for you must know, lieutenant, I would not give up his service, he was such a nice, pleasant gentleman, and whoever saw him must like him. And now he asked after everything that had happened, and

whether his brother were home yet, and I answered to everything and told him that the master was expected home in three days; well, and then how his mother and his sister-in-law were; and then he rummaged in the drawers of the writing-desk, and at last he asked, quite anxiously: 'Henry, did you arrange the room

Digitized by Google

when I went away so hurriedly recently?' 'Yes, Sir Baron,' said I. 'Did you not find a little gold heart?' 'No,' and he continued looking for it; and I looked, too, but nothing was found. At last he gave up, but he looked very sad. 'Do you know, Henry,' said he, then, 'that is a great loss to me. I will give you fifty dollars if you get the heart for me,' and then he took his hat and cane, for he always wore civilian's clothes when he was here, and said he would take a walk in the park before he waited upon the ladies. Well I knew where he was going.

"The fifty dollars stayed in my mind, lieutenant, and so I began to look and look again; but it was no use. And then I took the light and went in the adjoining bedroom, and while I was in there, it seemed to me that I heard the doors open near by, as softly and quietly as possible, and as I quickly entered the sitting-room again I started back, for there stood Sanna, and gave a start.

"Do you know, lieutenant, now I am older and quieter, but at that time I could not bear the thin woman, with the cold, gray eyes, the black hair, and the yellow face; she was always a false creature, and therefore I thundered out at her in the name of all the devils, and asked what she wanted here. 'The gracious lady would like to know,' said she, 'when Baron Fritz returns?' She always called me Enrico at that time, for she was proud of her Italian origin. 'Where is the baron?' she asked once more. 'Go to the devil!' cried I to her, and 'do not spy around. I do not know where he is,' and with that I wished to push her out. 'Hark!' said she, and as I was silent we heard the village bells tolling for some one dead; she began to cross herself

Digitized by Google

and say an Ave Maria, but I pushed her out. 'Do that outside! Do you understand?' and then she turned round before the door, and said, 'Do you know, Enrico, who is dead? It is the rag-miller's Lisette.'

"The miller's Lisette! I was so frightened that I trembled. Gracious, what will Baron Fritz say? was my first thought; he went to her so happy, so jovial—and now dead, the pretty young thing. It was a pleasure, sir, to see the girl; whether you see the rag-miller's Lieschen—I would say the baron's betrothed—or her great-aunt, Lisette, it is just the same—Lieschen is her very image. And as I stood there a storm rose so that the trees bent, and it howled and groaned round the old walls in all the keys. Baron Fritz did not come, and meanwhile the weather grew worse and worse; and it was just as if the hurricane would tear down the tower; in the darkness the eye could distinguish no object, however I tried and pressed my face against the window. The castle clock had struck ten, and still he did not return. Oh, sir, it was a fearful night! All at once the door flew open, and as I turned my horrified eyes beheld Baron Fritz—he stood in the middle of the room, and at his feet, pale and dishevelled, lay wild Fanny, and held her hands up to him in anxious supplication.

"'Request my sister-in-law, Henry,' said he, in a dull voice, 'to come here for a moment.' I flew to the door, lieutenant. I knew something terrible had happened, when I saw the girl's abject form, and as I tore open the door, there stood the baroness, your grandmother, outside, and wished to come in. She drew back when she discovered her brother-in-law; for a

Digitized by Google

moment her limbs shook as if in terror, but then she entered the room, apparently quite calm.

"Lieutenant, there can scarcely have ever been a more beautiful woman than she was; and as she stood there in her long white wrapper, her black hair half loosened, and with her great dark eyes shining from her pale face, she looked like an angel of innocence compared to the poor, whimpering creature on the floor.

"'*Mio caro amico*,' cried she to the baron, 'what does that mean?' and pointed, as if astonished, at Fanny.

"'Come in, Madame Sister-in-law,' replied he roughly. 'Go, Henry, and shut the door,'—now for the first time he turned his face to me. Sir, at that time I was a rough, wild fellow, but I shook, he looked so; his eyes seemed sunken, the young, blooming face had grown old and faded in mad agony, and his mouth twitched as if with furious rage. I will never forget the sight in all my life, and the deadly terror which I felt as I closed the door behind the baroness; my teeth chattered from excitement, and I stood there in the corridor as if spellbound. Sanna also crept up, and there we both stood, and scarcely ventured to breathe. At first what they said inside was unintelligible; one heard only the gentle voice of the lady, and in between, Fanny's sobs; but then it broke loose. We could plainly hear the baron's oaths—they were fearful words; the lady cried out many times in between, and Fanny moaned and cried; but Sanna threw herself on her knees and began to weep and pray, and her face was ashy.

"Then there was a pause, a short pause, and the baroness said a few words, and now, like a storm, the terrible words broke forth again. The baron, God help

Digitized by Google

him, lieutenant, it was fearful what he screamed in such a loud voice; it was the outburst of boundless agony, of a desperate heart, which relieved itself by curses. He cursed his home, his brother's wife, and called her 'murderess!' Oh, God, sir, I do not remember it myself now. I stood there silent and rigid, and then suddenly the door flew open, and the baroness rushed out and ran like a hunted woman along the corridor and down the stairs; she looked terribly, and, downstairs, as if seeking a support, she threw her arms round the pillars, and sunk to the ground unconscious. I can still see her—the white, crushed form, and how Sanna followed her, screaming, and carried her away in her arms. And almost at the same moment Fanny was pushed out, and the baron stood in the doorway. 'My horse!' commanded he, in a hoarse voice, and as I hurried downstairs Fanny ran down the hall, her hands before her face, and rushed out into the night and the storm. I brought the baron's horse before the door; he swung himself up, with a pale, distorted face; the poor animal, it gave a great leap, he pressed the spurs into its sides so deeply; then he galloped away so that I thought an accident would happen; and then suddenly he came back. I still stood on the front steps, in the wind and storm, and heard the horse's hoof-beâts coming nearer and nearer.

"'Listen, Henry,' said he; 'go to my old mother, and tell her good-by for me; she will never see me again—I will spare her the sight of an unhappy man.' The last I scarcely understood—the storm blew it away or his voice broke with tears, I do not know; he gave me his hand, and then he was gone, sir, and never came back again

Digitized by Google

"But Fanny I saw once more; she lay out there on the place under the old trees, on her knees, and as she heard him ride away in the gloomy, strange night, she screamed so shrilly that I ran down to her. And there, sir, I found a poor, unhappy creature, who wished to kill herself in remorse and misery; and then I saw that she was not so bad, and I consoled her in her grief—well, and then she told me that Baron Fritz and the beautiful Lisette had been separated, and that she had died because she had believed that he was untrue to her, and—that is all that I know.

"One thing more," he began, after a pause, during which the young man before him had continued silent, with gloomy, frowning brow; "this belongs to it: That evening, as I once more went down the stairs, just on the same spot where the baroness had fallen down, something gold sparkled. I picked it up and looked at it by the light of the great lamp which hung there on the stairs. It was a little gold heart, and on it was engraved, 'L. E.' I turned the thing over on all sides; that was certainly what the baron had looked for so diligently. But how came it here? But before I could consider, Sanna stood beside me, and looked over my shoulder; and at the same moment, with her spindle fingers, she had snatched the thing from me and run away. I was angry, and hurried after her to the baroness's rooms; then she flew in like the wind, and the bolt was immediately shot. I only heard many exclamations in Italian, which sounded very joyous, and immediately after the lady's voice; then all was quiet.

"At that time, sir, I did not know what to make of it, but afterwards, gradually all became clear to me,

Digitized by Google

and gradually also what Baron Fritz, in his grief for his dead love, had called down upon the house was fulfilled. Terrible times came, sir—terrible times; but the tower room has remained locked to this day, and he who once occupied it never returned. It was a pity about him, lieutenant—a sad pity; he was cheated out of all his happiness——"

"You think, Henry, that my grandmother really——" The young man's voice sounded constrained.

"Oh, sir, it does not become me to believe any evil of my mistress. I have no proof that Baron Fritz had a right to utter the fearful curses; but this I know very well, that the baroness had not been on good terms with him for a long time, because—well, he once interfered in her affairs; then, too, she was horribly proud. At no price would she have acknowledged the miller's Lisette as her sister-in-law, and therefore, lieutenant—no harm—I may surely tell you. I have seen you lie in your cradle, and watched you grow up. Do not be vexed with me—Lieschen——"

"Is my betrothed, Henry——"

"Sir, I know it; and was glad when I saw you both, as I never believed I should be glad again. Ah, sir, cherish your betrothed, and do not let her out of your sight. It worries one to think of such a young creature up here in the castle. Pardon me, baron! My heart forced me to say this to you. She is so like Lisette—especially the very same eyes, just so blue and deep and clear, and just the same expression in them. Such eyes one never forgets. God grant them tears of joy only!"

The old man's voice was moved as he now went out, and his "good night!" sounded indistinct to Army;

Digitized by Google

but he did not think of it. They also, these blue, childish eyes, rose to his mind, but so pained, so timid, and so indescribably sad, as he had seen them this evening.

"The same eyes," he repeated, half aloud; "the same expression!" but he looked over at the picture of the beautiful Agnes Mechthilde. The light burned low—it only flickered occasionally, unsteadily; and the red, luxuriant hair disappeared in the dull light—only the two dark, sad eyes looked unchangeably out of the pale face at the young man, so steeped in misery, so timidly, as if they sought a lost happiness.

Digitized by Google

XIX.

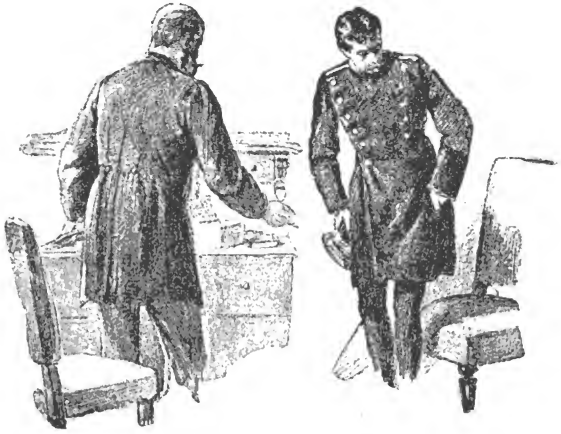
The following morning Army went to the mill. His future father-in-law had desired an interview with him. He did not see Lieschen; Auntie, who came out of the kitchen and opened the door of the miller's room for him, upon his questioning her, answered that the young girl was still asleep, and a little bit of rest was very necessary, and would be beneficial when one had cried the whole night long.

A deep shadow was on his face when he entered the room; he had longed to see Lieschen since yesterday evening, and the thought that she had wept the whole night made his heart very heavy. He had to wait some moments. Mr. Erving was in his office, and involuntarily Army's glance wandered over the room. It was very comfortable, with its dark carpet, the green furniture and hangings. On a massive writing-desk stood a portrait; it was a photograph of Lieschen as a child. The dear little face gazed out upon the world so naïvely and roguishly; so had he known her—the long, brown braids, there they were again. He took up the picture to see it more closely, and still held it in his hand when now Mr. Erving entered.

The face of the stately man wore an expression unusual to it of care and weariness; he could scarcely have slept the night before. "Pardon that I kept you waiting," he began, giving the young man his hand; "I found quite a number of business matters, because

Digitized by Google

yesterday, and for the first time, I was not there punctually. Sit down," said he, "and let us at once proceed to our affairs. The sooner the better. I will not speak useless words," he continued, and drew a chair to the desk. "First of all, I think we had better both go to your garrison, in order to arrange matters there; then you can hand in your resignation—you must not take it amiss in me to desire this so positively! She is my only child"—his voice trembled at these words—



"and I wish to at least keep her near me—under my protection."

Army bowed assent, but the blood rushed hotly to his cheeks.

"It will be hard for you?" asked Mr. Erving.

"No!" replied the young man firmly.

Digitized by Google

"I desire nothing unreasonable," continued the miller. "You know that my family have purchased a considerable share of the neighboring land which formerly belonged to yours. Now, Lieschen is our only child, and I have considered with my wife that it would be best for you to be again what your fathers were—namely, Lord of Derenberg. I have already written this morning to Hellwig how things stand, and requested him to meet me at S——, principally with the view to discovering how much of the estate of your ancestors which is in no good hands can be purchased back, in order to join it to the rest. Let us hope that we will succeed in acquiring the greater part. So that is what I intend doing. From you, therefore, I expect that——" He suddenly broke off; then he went to the desk and looked among the papers.

"I did not give my consent with a light heart"—he turned again to the young man, and his voice sounded soft and gentle—"for I feared that my daughter would have many humiliations to bear; but she would not have it otherwise; she would be sick and miserable if you went away. I really know you only from your childhood, for you have not entered my house as a young man; but the little that I know of you is not exactly calculated to make me give you my unlimited confidence. You have until now walked faithfully in the footsteps of your grandmother, who sees in people of my rank very inferior creatures. Your ancestors—that I know—thought otherwise. I have now given you the dearest that we—my invalid wife and I—possess in the whole world; and therefore I demand that you protect my child and cherish her. I do not wish her to be treated by your grandmother as your unhappy mother

Digitized by Google

was. This promise I can desire of you, and you must give it to me now. As soon as I see tears in the eyes of my child, I make you responsible for them. Can you promise to do everything to protect my child from the arrogance of that woman?" He held out his hand to him.

The young officer stood motionless, and gazed at the floor. He felt as if he must embrace as a father this man who so generously gave him his dearest treasure in the world, who spoke so kindly to him. And still something deeply humiliating weighed upon him like a mountain.

"Lieschen shall never regret that she saved me from a dark future," said he, as he seized the hand, and the tremor of his voice betrayed how deeply the elder man's words had touched him. "I shall know how to protect her in every manner—even from my grandmother. I am indeed warned."

"I believe you," said Mr. Erving; "and now, for the moment, we have nothing more to say to each other. I am, besides, very busy, as we must leave this evening."

"I will be ready," assured Army. "I also have something important to discuss with my grandmother."

Erving gave a quick, penetrating glance at the face of the young man before him. It seemed calm; only his eyes sparkled excitedly.

"Do not let yourself be carried away," admonished Mr. Erving, and laid his hand on Army's shoulder. "She is, and remains, the mother of your father; and one must respect age. I desire nothing more than that she does not make my child unhappy—for the rest, she may act as she will. So, calmness, Army, do you hear? She is an old woman."

Digitized by Google

It was the first time that he had called the young officer by his given name. Army glanced at him, quite touched. That was the man of whom he had once in his foolish pride said he could not associate under his roof, and now he cared for him like a father. He now owed him everything — everything — his whole future.

"Now go, Army!" said he, as the young man seized his hand and pressed it silently, "and this evening we will leave. Go—and, once more—moderation."

He went away as if in a dream. Up there at the end of the walk rose the castle, and the imposing arms-adorned portal. He gazed at it for a moment, only to look away again immediately. He seemed to himself so small, so contemptible, to-day.

He raised his head, and his face wore an expression of determination as he now mounted the stairs which led to his grandmother's room. Then Nelly came to meet him; her eyes sparkled like sunlight.

"How is Lieschen, Army?" asked she, and standing on one step, threw both arms round his neck. He looked in her laughing face—she was so happy about her new sister.

"Will you do me a favor, little one?" asked he, and stroked back the curls from her forehead. She nodded willingly.

"Then go to her—yes? But soon, at once, and tell her I send greeting, and she must not cry any more. I beg her very earnestly—do you hear?" He hurriedly loosened her little hands, and turned away, as he read an astonished, questioning expression upon her face. "Only go soon!" he called back; "and stay with her a while. I now have to speak with grandmamma."

Digitized by Google

In the corridor Sanna hurried past him; her bow was somewhat pert.

"Can I speak with grandmamma now?" asked he.

"I was already twice in your room, baron," replied she. "Your grandmamma is waiting impatiently."

He walked quickly past her and entered. The old lady sat in her usual place beside the fire; she nodded slightly, and motioned to a chair. "You have kept me waiting a long time," said she.

"I had a necessary interview with my future father-in-law," replied he, sitting down. "He was so kind as to communicate to me his plans for our future."

"So the experiment has succeeded?" asked she, using his own words. "Well, in any case, you have not exchanged rings; so we can still talk over the affair." He made an impatient movement. "You will please permit me to say a few more words to you?" asked she.

Army bowed slightly, and his eyes suddenly rested upon a letter which the slender fingers of his grandmother held. He knew this heavy cream-colored paper, and suddenly the blood rushed madly to his heart.

"First," began the old lady, and took from a little table near her a second letter, "here is a very kind letter from the Duke of R——. He wishes to become acquainted with your affairs, and promises me to interest himself for you in every manner. That is a promise the extent of which, let us hope, you know how to appreciate. Your position as officer is assured; your career undoubted." She looked at him penetratingly. "My advice is that you end this absurd farce down there in the mill, and immediately travel to B——."

Digitized by Google

"Grandmamma," replied he calmly, "that cannot possibly be your serious opinion."

"It is—certainly!" she assured him. "You have rushed with full sails into the most obscure circumstances, and I should like to save you from them in a manner suitable to your rank."

"Suitable to my rank?" he asked. "Hardly. The circumstances which I enter are the best to be found."

"Perhaps as partner to your father-in-law—rag-miller No. 2! Eh?"

"Pray, grandmamma, let us drop the subject. I will never withdraw my word, even if your proposal could allure me—but so much the less, as I do not trace the slightest inclination to withdraw."

"Then I leave the house!" cried she angrily, "before your wife sets her foot in it."

"I should be very sorry, grandmamma. With a little kindness and pleasantness, you could make good so much. In truth, if you behave to the family of my betrothed and to her herself as you began yesterday, it is——"

"Better that I go?" asked she. "Good, Army, I will. See, here is a way."

She held the cream-colored note before his eyes; he recognized the dainty writing of his faithless *fiancée;* involuntarily he stepped back. "Blanche?" said he dully; "she writes to you?"

"Do you know what she writes to me? She asks me to accompany her on a trip to Italy, because the colonel is prevented by duties from going with her. I should prefer to throw this scrawl, with the sweet, flattering words, in her face; but under these circumstances there is no other way. I accept her offer."

Digitized by Google

"You would—you could do that? You could go to her who deceived me, grandmamma?" asked the young man, and took her hand.

"There is nothing else left me. I cannot associate with those people down there. I will not, and I shall not," asserted she.

"Then it is really better that you go," said he softly, and turned away.

"So that is the thanks for all my love? That the fulfilment of all the hopes which I had placed in you!" she burst forth. "Incredible! When I think of you there on a writing-stool, in the office of your father-in-law," she continued, breathlessly, "writing, and keeping books—you, who so foolishly close your ears to the prospect of a brilliant career——"

"I must have been contented if my father-in-law had assigned me to a writing-stool; but he has done better for me. Lieschen brings me as dowry our old family estate. I shall again be Baron of Derenberg."

He had spoken slowly, and emphasized each word.

She turned around with a start; her great eyes looked at him as if veiled, as if she did not believe his words.

"Purchased dearly enough!" she uttered with difficulty.

"How so?"

"Because you will be chained forever to a wife at whom those of your own rank shrug their shoulders; and, finally, whom you do not love, whom you will never love!"

"Who tells you that?" asked he, and a slight smile played about his mouth. "Is the last so impossible? I should think you would know from your own experience that such does not lie beyond the bounds of possi-

Digitized by Google

bility. Think of the vanished Great-uncle Fritz, and the beautiful Lisette——"

The old lady did not answer; she seated herself with a violent movement in the arm-chair, and her fingers crushed Blanche's letter; but her face had grown pale—as pale as the lace on her cap.

"My brother-in-law never thought of marrying the girl," said she, at length. "I must protect him from that. It was such a love-affair as cavaliers have by the dozen. The knowledge of this story should restrain you from the foolish idea of making a girl from that house your wife!"

"Oh, not at all; on the contrary, if anything could strengthen me in my resolution, it is this. I will thus make good what senseless arrogance and ignoble revenge once destroyed."

"These dark insinuations are perfectly incomprehensible to me," she interrupted him, and rose excitedly. "Your grandfather's brother was a man who possessed no control over himself, who led a loose, dissolute life. He has disappeared—God knows where. He was a deceiver, who knew how to conceal his frivolous disposition excellently under the mask of an honest, honorable exterior. I am sorry that you have let a legend be imposed upon you in which this moralizing hussar officer, together with that Lisette, play the rôles of saints. But just because already such unsuitable relations have occurred once between us and those people down there—which, God be thanked, would be shattered by closer inspection—therefore, I repeat to you, that neither now nor ever will I look upon the girl as your betrothed; neither now nor ever will I give her my hand; and if you persist in your determination—good!

Digitized by Google

I will go—I know now where." She raised Blanche's letter. "And although it will be hard for me to take this step to her who deceived you, I prefer it to the idea

of living in the house with this person." Her lips trembled, and her eyes sparkled with rage.

"Good; then go, grandmamma. I am sorry that it comes so, but you would have the fullest right to say that I was no man, but a weak dreamer whose arm the little bit of misfortune had paralyzed, if I changed my resolution. As a man of honor, I cannot; but also I do not wish to, because I am not so foolish as to throw away a whole future full of happiness." At the last words a light shone from his eyes which completely ban-

Digitized by Google

ished the gloomy expression with which he had looked at the old lady.

"You yourself tell me to go?" asked the old lady breathlessly.

"No, grandmamma, I should prefer to see you living on peacefully in my house; but as you place the choice before me—you or she—from the bottom of my heart I can only say, my betrothed!"

"Good!" replied she. "I go; and were you to go on your knees to me, and you all together to beg me, wringing your hands, I should be firm—I will still go. It is disgraceful, it is unheard of, to drive an old woman from her home!" With trembling haste she pulled the bell-rope, and began to open different drawers of her writing-table—letters, boxes, little jewel cases, flew out in wild confusion.

"I beg you, grandmamma, who drives you away?" said he calmly. "I repeat to you. I should prefer you to stay; we all would try to make your life pleasant; it is wholly in your power to stay; my betrothed——"

"Do not finish the word!" she cried, and stamped her foot. "I *will* not hear it! No one here has ever loved me. I have never been understood: and you, in whom all my hopes were centred, you are like all the rest—pitiably plebeian, not worthy of bearing an old name!"

The hot, southern temperament broke out unrestrainedly, and her hands fumbled convulsively in the drawers and collected everything in the most furious haste, as if they were to be saved from fire.

"My travelling trunks!" she commanded Sanna, upon her entrance. "Pack up your things too. We are going away."

Digitized by Google

At this moment a little shining object flew over the carpet and remained lying at Army's feet. He picked it up and looked at it. It was a little gold heart, scratched and dull, and on it were engraved the letters, "L. E." He stared at it for a long time. But the excited woman did not notice it. She arranged the letters with feverish haste. Near her already lay a pile of crumpled papers, and again and again the trembling hands crushed letters and other papers, and threw them down. It was impossible for him to say a word; he only went up to her and held out the little gold heart. Her eyes rested upon it, and then she suddenly leaned heavily against the table; the flush disappeared from

her cheeks, and a deathly pallor spread over her face. Not a sound broke the silence; only the little images

Digitized by Google

on the writing-table rattled softly, the baroness's trembling form leaned so heavily against it.

"I have no right to reproach you," said he, at length, and drew back the hand which held the little object. "You are the mother of my father, and—besides, it would be useless. But I will try doubly to make good to my betrothed your sin against a young, lovely creature. God grant that I may succeed!" He turned to go.

Then Sanna barred his way. "What do you want of my mistress?" cried she. "I took the golden amulet from Baron Fritz. I alone did it; my *signora* is innocent. Drive me away, sir, but do not take her home away from her, the only place where she can lay her head!" The old woman had slipped to the floor, and stretched out her hands to him in supplication, and tears shone in the cold, gray eyes.

"I do not send your mistress away," said the young man, touched by the fidelity of the harsh old creature; "on the contrary, I——"

"Stand up!" commanded the baroness, excitedly, "and do what I tell you. Not another word; I leave to-day!"

"*Misericordia!*" sobbed the old woman, in her great terror, and seized the folds of the black dress of her mistress. "Let me go with you, Signora Eleonora! I shall die without you."

He looked at the imperious form which stood there in the middle of the room, her head thrown proudly back, sorrowfully. The black eyes gazed at him sharply and hostilely, as if a strange beggar stood before her whom she wished to turn away. He had always so loved, so admired, her, his beautiful grand-

Digitized by Google

mother; even now, when the nimbus with which he had once surrounded her had disappeared—even now this love remained victorious. He forgot her imperious nature, her roughness; he only saw the proud, imposing woman who had once brought him up with idolatrous tenderness.

"Grandmamma," begged he, and took a step nearer; "let what once happened be forgotten! I offer you my hand; nothing here shall remind you of the past——"

"Go!" commanded she shortly, and her hand motioned him a farewell, in her proud and yet so graceful manner. "Go! I wish to be alone. I have yet much to arrange."

He went up to her. "Farewell!" said he; "and if you are ever homesick, then come. You will——"

"Adieu!" she interrupted, and drew away the hand which he wished to draw to his lips. "You have chosen." She turned her back to him.

"Oh, the curse! the curse! Oh, *dio mio!*" sobbed the old woman, who still knelt on the floor, wringing her hands.

"Fool!" he heard his grandmother say, then the door was locked between him and her.

Digitized by Google

XX.

THE last day in the old year! Is there not something solemn and sad in it? It is a farewell mood which the human heart feels, and a shy retrospection and questioning. What did the old year give us, how much it took from us, and what will the new year bring? Joy or pain, happiness or hard losses?

There is a time in which one does not ask such questions—a time in which one believes that each day of the future must be more and more beautiful, when the garden of our dreams bears numbers of lovely blossoms, and one awaits in blissful impatience the bursting of the buds, in order to steep himself in a fairy-like splendor of flowers; but time passes, bud after bud falls withered to the earth, and only a few blossom, alone and tremblingly, lest the rough breeze which killed their sisters disturb them also. And whoever saw such blossoms fall stands with sad, questioning heart at the gate of the new year, and apprehensively folds his hands and involuntarily asks—What will the future bring me? Will the buds of our hopes wither or blossom? It is sad when young hearts must already ask these questions—when a frost in spring has scattered all this sunny splendor of blossoms with their promise of happiness.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when uneasiness drove Lieschen to the castle. Army had been away with her father for four days, and she had

Digitized by Google

received no news of him. She started every time when the old postman passed the house, and waited, with anxiously beating heart, for Minnie to place a letter in her hands, and each time she had hoped in vain, and bowed her head sadly. Why should he write? He did not love her.

And to-day was the last of the year—a day which had usually been such a happy one in her home—dear friends, jest and gravity, recollections and dreams of the future—and to-day? Father not at home, mother so quiet, Auntie sad, and uncle and aunt in the parsonage in deep affliction for their darling. And she?

Then she walked up the path to the castle. She must ask whether Nelly or his mother had news of him. Her father's letter had been so short; he had found everything much more confused than he had thought, he wrote; and when he would return was yet unsettled. No greeting from him—not a word for her!

She *must* hear something of him to-day. As she walked, she looked through the bare branches of the trees to the portal, which was just visible. Heavy, gray clouds hung in the heavens, and an unpleasant, warm breeze met her. In the dull light the old castle looked mysteriously gloomy—so empty, so deserted, a true nest of misfortune, as Auntie said. How many years have come and gone over these old roofs, and how many will yet come and go; and what will they bring? What one has once lost never returns; and she—she had lost so very, very much, the whole wonderful spring-time of love! Of all the bright blossoms, only thorns had remained, which pressed into her wounded heart. No sweet happiness at the side of the beloved husband; only a life of never wearied friendship, a

Digitized by Google

continual self-forgetfulness; only painful smiles, but no love for her. And for this reason, also, no letter.

Why should he write to her? She remembered how she had once seen her mother open, with a happy smile, a package of old letters which had lain carefully guarded in a little box. "Your father's letters," she had said, when the young girl asked her, "from the time when we were betrothed." What happiness had shone in her mother's eyes! She would never know that. She pressed her hands together on her breast, and walked quickly on.

Now she left the walk, and directed her steps across the open place; there a carriage was waiting before the side door. "A carriage? How came a carriage here? Had Army—— But no; then her father would have come also."

She shook her head, as she walked round the carriage; it was a forlorn old vehicle, the coachman in a badly made coat, a pair of heavy field horses who could scarcely trot—certainly a conveyance from the village. She entered the castle, and suddenly stood still. It seemed to her that she heard voices and steps. It was

Digitized by Google

already dark in the long, arched passage; only on the broad steps which led upstairs a faint light fell through the windows of the landing; again she drew back hesitatingly.

"You did not wish it otherwise," she heard the somewhat sharp voice of the old baroness say. "By Heaven! I find tears perfectly superfluous, Cornelia."

The young girl at the same time heard a rustling of dresses and light steps. The baroness appeared upon the upper step, half turning back to her daughter-in-law and Nelly. She was wrapped in a velvet and fur mantle, which had certainly once been costly, and her proud face looked out, pale as marble, from a black lace shawl which she had wound round her head.

"It is the anxiety about you, dear mamma," said the younger baroness, "in this weather! And you are so wholly unaccustomed to the discomforts of travelling."

Travel? She was going? For a moment a feeling of pure joy filled Lieschen's heart.

"The necessary consequences of your actions, Cornelia," was the reply. "Meanwhile, do not worry yourself! I am not yet so frail that I——"

"It has come too quickly, mamma—too quickly."

"Too quickly? I have counted the moments with impatience. I would have preferred to leave in the same hour."

"It will be very hard for me to see you depart without an explanation."

"Without an explanation?" asked the old lady. "I think I have most sought an explanation, but no one would understand me. Do you think it is easy for me to go? At this moment I feel the sadness with all its force, whatever sorrowful times I have lived through

Digitized by Google

here. But to remain under the conditions which the future master of Derenberg exacted, to remain and lead the life which he offered me, at the price of sacrificing my feelings to his new, certainly not at all aristocratic ideas—never! I am still of the old school—*noblesse oblige!*"

"She is going on my account," whispered the young girl; "she is going——"

"I believe that Army left with the sure hope of finding you here still, mamma," pleaded the daughter-in-law.

The old lady laughed loudly. "*Dio mio!* you are classic, Cornelia! You tell me that now when I am about to get into the carriage? All day long you have tried very consequentially not to mention Army by a syllable. He knows very well that he will not find me, and it is good so. I *will* not see him again. Why renew the conflict? He has completely deprived me of all pleasure in living here longer, by his corrupt ideas. A man who refuses an offer which opens the doors of a brilliant career to him, all that a young, ambitious man can even desire, deserves that one should give him up."

"I know—the duke, mamma, but——"

"You are just as foolish as he, Cornelia. Not another word; these explanations, besides, now, at the moment of departure, are too late." She came all the way downstairs.

"Stay, baroness," then said a trembling voice, and a girl's pale face leaned towards her in the twilight. "Stay! it is not yet too late; if it is so—I give Army back his freedom. I did not know that another way had opened for his rescue——" She was silent, and mechanically clutched at the carved railing of the stairs. The dark figure of the old lady drew back from

Digitized by Google

her in terror, but with one spring Nelly was beside her brother's betrothed, and seized her hand.

"What are you saying, Lieschen?" asked she. "What do you wish to do?"

"You should have thought of that sooner, my child," said the old lady sharply. "Now your better insight comes too late."

"I wished to help him—save him," replied she, tonelessly; "but never would I stand in the way of his happiness. Oh, surely it is not yet too late, baroness!" cried she imploringly, as the old lady, with an inimicably proudly thrown back head wished to walk past her. "Stay until he comes, gracious lady; tell him he has no obligations at all to me! I myself set him free, so that he may elsewhere find the happiness which I cannot give him. Oh, stay! stay!" The trembling hands clutched the velvet mantle. "I know he does not love me!" The sweet voice echoed piteously back from the high walls.

The old lady did not shake off the little trembling hands; she stood there as if spellbound, and looked at the beautiful face which, so distorted, gazed up at her in the strange twilight of the dead winter day. Her expression did not change: not a trace of pity for the anxious child shone from her black eyes, not a word came from her lips—she let herself taste that fear to the last drop.

"He does not love me!" repeated the pale lips, and the hands slipped down. "Stay! Stay!"

Then a hasty, well-known tread resounded through the hall, and down there in the twilight of the passage appeared a slender man's form. The young girl saw him approach, with dry, burning eyes—he, too, came?

Digitized by Google

She must find him here, also? Must then this hour be made still harder for her? As if she wished to see nothing more, so as to remain strong, she covered her face with her hands.

"What is going on here?"—his voice sounded hasty and excited to her ear now. "My betrothed is crying?"

His betrothed! How indescribably this word pained her! Were she only away from here, a thousand miles away, so that she might escape this torment!

"She is more sensible than you," replied the old lady. "Once more you stand at the turning-point, for she is ready to withdraw——"

"Because you have made it plausible for her?" was the angry answer. "Because you have probably insinuated to her that I will be unhappy with her? I might have thought that you would not leave a moment untried to once more attempt what you formerly so successfully accomplished!"

"No, Army," his mother interrupted him. "Lieschen accidentally heard that grandmamma——"

"What did you hear, Lieschen?" asked he, putting his arm round her, and bending down to her. How soft his voice was, all at once! "Will they, then, continually assert that we cannot be at all happy together?"

She did not answer, but the tears now rolled from her eyes, and fell over the slender fingers which still covered her face. She did not see how anxiously he looked at her; she did not hear the old lady walk on with a shrug of the shoulders; that his mother and Nelly followed her—she only felt again the hot, burning pain that she must relinquish him, and that even a life without love at his side was yet a paradise to the emptiness which stared at her if she renounced him.

Digitized by Google

"Lieschen," he begged. "You could really be so—so sensible as grandmother just asserted?"

She nodded.

"Yes, yes!" she sobbed, exerting all her self-control. "I did not know that the duke would help you, or else—oh, or else I would never have come here to—I thought—I—I alone could save you."

"That you can indeed," said he softly; "you alone can—no one else in all the wide world."

He took her hands from her face and looked into her tearful eyes.

"Lieschen, if you knew how very anxious I am about you——"

She shook her head.

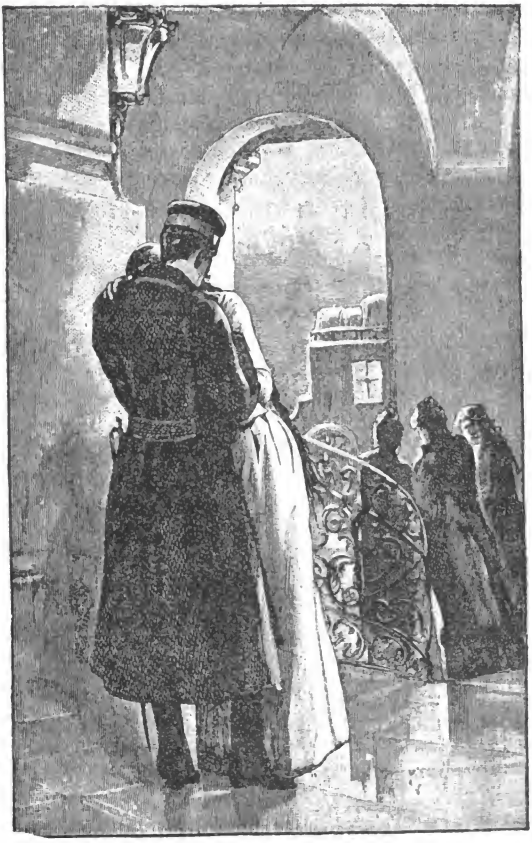
"Oh, yes—oh, yes; continually a pair of sad blue eyes rise before me, and a long past mournful story of two just such eyes, which died of grief and heartache. It fills me with horror when I think of it; and my anxiety, my forebodings, were not groundless. I almost came too late, did I not?"

"No, no, Army; it is compassion in you; you do not know what you throw away—a brilliant life, a proud career. Leave me! It is not yet too late!" she implored anxiously.

"You foolish child! I know very well, indeed, what I give up; but I also know what I win thereby—the best, the noblest, the purest that the world contains."

It had grown quiet in the old arched hallway—quiet and dark; below, a carriage just clattered over the stone pavement of the castle yard, then all was quiet again—only a mysterious whispering. The last day of the year was drawing to a close—what will the new year bring?

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

XXI.

THE earth was adorned with all its spring-time splendor. The trees and bushes wore the first young green. In the Ervings' garden bloomed narcissi and elder; the golden rain bent over the hedge, and the hawthorn's branches bent with the heavy weight of pink blossoms. In the park the mild breeze rocked the young leaves of the linden trees, and kissed each blade of grass on the broad, green, velvety lawn, as if it would tell them of new pleasures and new life. And new happiness and new life were proclaimed by the fountain, which rose, clear as crystal, high into the air from the old sandstone basin, and fell back again, foaming and bubbling. As formerly, long years ago, the massive, heavy doors of the portal were thrown wide open, as if they knew that soon, in a few weeks, the happy lord of the castle would lead his beautiful young wife over the old threshold of his fathers' house. The green, mossy carpet had disappeared from the steps, and the two old bears looked strangely defiant under a pair of heavy green wreaths of oak leaves which a playful hand had placed upon their respectable heads.

The long rows of windows in the castle were opened; only a few were covered by thick curtains. These rooms did not need the spring sun, for their occupant was absent. She was gone—really gone. Not an eye lash of the proud face had quivered as she, on that New

Digitized by Google

Year's eve, got into the miserable carriage which took her away from the place which had for long years been her home. Coldly and lightly her lips had rested upon the foreheads of daughter-in-law and granddaughter. Did she know that in the last moment her grandson had preserved for himself a happiness in whose radiance everything else faded?—and so she closed her once so much admired starry eyes as she drove past the old portal, and clinched her delicate hands, while Sanna leaned sobbing from the carriage—past! past! What will the coming year bring her?

And now the young baron was expected back every day. He had, until taking possession of his estate, been staying with a friend of his, so as to make himself acquainted with his new calling without loss of time. Upstairs, in the little, so long closed tower room, stood Nelly, with old Henry. The two round windows were also wide open, and she looked out over the park, with a happy smile, and her eyes rested on the windows, sparkling in sunlight, of the paper mill, which lay there buried in an abundance of flowers.

"See, Henry," cried she; "now I too know why my brother wrote we should prepare just this room for him."

"Oh, yes; there is quite a lovely view here," said the old man, with a significant smile on his furrowed face. "The baron will never wish to give it up when once he has occupied it."

"But it is very pretty here," said the young girl, looking about her in the little round room. "How comfortable—and the view!"

Henry straightened for the hundredth time a couple of old-fashioned chairs which stood near a little oval

Digitized by Google

table. "And now the oak-leaf garlands on the door outside, miss! Then he can come, then everything is ready. I had never thought that I should live to see this," he concluded, and shook his gray head happily. "Things turn out strangely in this world, miss—too strangely."

In the mill, everything apparently went on as usual, only the mistress of the house had been absent for some weeks. She had gone to Italy with the inspector's sick Bertha; but she would soon return, they said, strong and well.

But Auntie was anxious about her darling; she was a too quiet betrothed, she said. The girl sat half the day looking thoughtfully and dreamily before her; she preferred to sit alone in her room upstairs and let Auntie torment herself with the heavy piles of linen which she drew out of the old chests to be cut up and sewed. "It is all indifferent to her," she murmured sadly to herself, as her eyes rested upon these important treasures of every housekeeper. "She has no interest in her dowry, the poor child; she renounces so much. She does not know how it is when one is loved by her sweetheart with all his heart." But every evening since that New Year's eve the old hands were folded in a prayer of thanks that the old baroness was gone.

She was much more relieved, the old woman, now that she knew this, and the warm, tender love which the mother-in-law and Nelly felt for the young girl. This would almost have reconciled her with the affair, if only Army——

And again a May evening descended upon the earth, fragrant and moonlit, and again the old woman sat at the window of her little room, her hands folded, and

Digitized by Google

meditated. She thought of Lieschen's mother in distant Italy; she thought of the proud, restless woman, who now, through her own fault, reviles God and man. Her thoughts flew back to her long vanished youth, to her Christian and her Lisette. "If they were still alive! If they knew how things looked here! If they knew that the band which once was so roughly torn apart now should be united again!" And without, the water rushed by with its old melody, the Black Forest clock's monotonous tic-tac sounded between, and from the yard sounded the girls' songs.

"Where is Lieschen?" she asked herself. "Can she have received a letter again to-day? Can he have written when he is coming?" She rose and tripped out of the room: the moonbeams fell on the good old face and the snow-white cap. "Lieschen!" she called into the sitting-room; no answer. She went back through the dark hall and up the stairs. "She surely is not crying?" thought she. She looked into the comfortable, girlish room; not a trace of her. Shaking her head, she withdrew, and involuntarily directed her steps to another door. Softly she opened it; the moonlight filled the little room with a white, shining radiance, and in this silver light there stood a light, slender girlish figure, immovable, and looked out of the window. The old woman stood there as if spellbound, and looked at the lovely well-known sight. Was it, then, still the time of youth? Was it, then, again May as once?

"He is coming," cried a sweet voice joyfully. "He is coming. I have seen the light." And softly and lightly she hurried by the old woman, and disappeared like a lovely spectre. And rightly; over there a light

Digitized by Google

shone in the little tower room; she leaned against the table by the window, and stared out over at it. Her youthful dream had awaked again. "All-merciful

God!" said she softly, and clasped her hands, "am I dreaming—am I dreaming?"

And then she hurried down. With hesitating steps, she went out of the house; the garden lay in white moonlight, and an intoxicating perfume of flowers met her. She wandered on as once, in long, long past

Digitized by Google

youth; the nightingales sung so mysteriously, and from the other side of the road, in vibrating tones, sounded the monotonous concert of the frogs. Now she crossed the gravel place before the arbor—in reality there was whispering within. Softly she crept up and bent back the branches; there they sat together on the bench—she had thrown her arm round his neck and hidden her face on his breast, and he kissed again and again her brown hair, and called her the tenderest caressing names. And now she raised her face, and in the bright moonlight which fell upon them the old woman saw a pair of large blue eyes, which clung, with an expression of the purest happiness, to his face, bent down to her.

Carefully she dropped the branches and stepped back; she had seen enough. Softly, softly she walked back along the path, and occasionally she wiped her eyes with the corners of her apron. Under the linden trees before the front door lay deep shadow; she seated herself upon the sandstone bench and looked out over the garden, with tightly clasped hands; and her old lips murmured a warm prayer of thanks. What she had scarcely ventured to hope, was no dream—it was reality!

From the other side of the water sounded a fresh, girlish voice amid all the spring melodies. A light dress shone in the moonlight, nearer and nearer came the song, and every word sounded plainly to the old woman's ears:

"Oh, love comes softly as the spring,
Before one thinks or knows,
And charmeth from a withered thing
The sweetest, reddest rose.

Digitized by Google

"It wakes the loveliest melody
In hearts which, torn with strife,
Had thought there was no time of May,
Nor any rose in life."

"Lieschen! Army!" Nelly called loudly into the quiet garden, as she now stood under the linden tree, "where are you?"

No answer—only the nightingales sung on.

"Leave them, Nelly," said an old voice near her, and a hand drew her down on the bench. "Let them enjoy the May time and the roses. So many storms came before they could bloom!"

And the moonlight quivered over the tree-tops; the water rushed on, and the nightingales sung; and "God keep for them the roses and May!" whispered once more the old woman's voice—"the roses and May!"

THE END.

Digitized by Google

A DAUGHTER OF THE PHILISTINES

By LEONARD MERRICK

"It is the kind one longs to find after trying many and not meeting satisfaction."—*Times Union, Albany.*

"A constantly increasing pleasure as you peruse page after page."—*Evening Gazette, Boston.*

"It is a good one and an interesting one."—*Buffalo Express.*

"A noteworthy novel."—*Chicago Tribune.*

"He works out the situation to a fortunate conclusion."—*Book Buyer.*

"A distinctly good novel of real life."—*Boston Times.*

"A capital story."—*New York Press.*

"It is a novel of more than usual interest and cannot fail of an abundant popularity."—*Army and Navy Journal.*

"A delightful story."—*Cincinnati Enquirer.*

"Has a quality of its own."—*Literary World.*

"Unusually strong points."—*Buffalo Commercial*

"An extremely clever story."—*Albany Argus.*

"Interesting creation."—*Louisville Times.*

"With a feeling of loving regret I lay down the book."—*Evening Record.*

"An interesting and well told tale."—*Evening Star, Washington.*

"An extremely clever tale."—*Indianapolis Sentinel.*

"More than usually interesting."—*News, Indianapolis.*

"An excellent story well told."—*Rochester Herald.*

"Starts upon a good literary level, and maintains it to the end, and never for a moment degenerates. . . . . One sits through the story with genuine pleasure, and rises from the reading of it with indubitable refreshment."—*Daily Chronicle.*

12mo, cloth, $1.25

NEW YORK: R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

Digitized by Google

12mo, cloth, $1.25

An Unofficial Patriot

By HELEN H. GARDENER

"It is a side of the slavery question of which Northern people knew nothing."—*John A. Cockerill, N. Y. Advertiser.*

"Strong and picturesque sketches of camp and field in the days of the Civil War."—*San Francisco Chronicle.*

"The book is being dramatized by Mr. James A. Herne, the well-known actor, author and manager."—*N. Y. Press.*

"It tells a splendid story."—*Journal, Columbus, O*

"Will be sure to attract the attention it deserves."—*Philadelphia Press.*

"In its scope and power it is unrivalled among war stories."—*Ideas, Boston, Mass.*

"In many ways the most remarkable historical novel of the Civil War."—*Home Journal, Boston, Mass.*

"The interview with Lincoln is one of the finest bits of dialogue in a modern book."—*Chicago Herald.*

"Will probably be the most popular and saleable novel since Robert Elsmere."—*Republican.*

"One of the most instructive and fascinating writers of our time."—*Courier-Journal, Louisville.*

"Is calculated to command as wide attention as Judge Tourgée's "Fool's Errand."—*N. Y. Evening Telegram.*

"Has enriched American literature."—*Item, Philadelphia.*

"Remarkably true to history."—*Inter-Ocean, Chicago*

"Entitled to a place with standard histories of the War."—*Atlanta Journal.*

NEW YORK: R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

Digitized by Google

12mo, cloth, $1.25

THE DAGGER AND THE CROSS

BY

JOSEPH HATTON

Author of "By Order of the Czar."

"Mostidramatic manner. . . . Deserves to rank well up in current fiction."—*Minneapolis Tribune.*

"Villainy of the deepest die, heroism of the highest sort, beauty wronged and long suffering, virtue finally rewarded, thrills without number."—*St. Louis Globe-Democrat.*

"Clean wholesome story, which should take prominent place in current fiction."—*Chicago Record.*

"Finely conceived and finely written."—*Toledo Blade.*

"This is his masterpiece."—*Buffalo Express.*

"The chief merit is the account of the Plague in Eyam. . . . . It is a true story and Eyam is a real village."—*Boston Journal.*

"Weird and interesting to the point of being absorbing. The only way to get the story is to read it."—*St. Louis Star.*

'Seventeenth century romance steeped in the traditions of the Church and of the times."—*Detroit Journal.*

NEW YORK

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

Digitized by Google

12mo, cloth, $1.25

THE CEDAR STAR

BY

MARY E. MANN

Author of "Susannah."

"An admirable piece of work, and is worth a crowd of far more pretentious productions."—*News and Courier, Charleston, S.C.*

"Heartily alive and extremely well written."—*Boston Gazette.*

"Resembles some of Stockton's works."—*Pittsburg Press.*

"Takes high rank among a decade's array of entertaining books."—*Boston Courier.*

"Possessing among other merits that of original detail."—*Cincinnati Times-Star.*

"The author has a very genius for clever character-drawing."—*Detroit Journal.*

"There is much force and action,"—*Boston Herald.*

"Intense human interest."—*Bulletin.*

"The author has a genius for clever character drawing."—*Baltimore American.*

"An unusually pleasing novel and well written." *Philadelphia Press.*

"A charming book, beginning with good chapters of child-life, and containing memorable figures, notably Billy the Curate and Betty herself. Betty is, indeed, quite a discovery."—*London Academy.*

NEW YORK

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

Digitized by Google

12mo, cloth, $1.25

THE MAN WHO WAS GOOD

BY

LEONARD MERRICK

AUTHOR OF

"A Daughter of the Philistines," "One Man's Views."

"A second success. . . . . An exceptionally able novel."—*Literary Review.*

"Remarkable for its splendid delineation of character, its workmanship and natural arrangement of plot."—*Chicago Daily News.*

"Has distinction of style and character, dramatic force and literary effectiveness."—*Phila. Press.*

"An intensely dramatic story, and written with force and precision."—*New York Times.*

"Mr. Merrick's work is of a very high quality. Is the most masterly of his three books."—*Chicago Tribune.*

"The delicacy of the character sketching has a brilliancy and fascination strangely magnetic."—*Minneapolis Tribune.*

"Is a forceful, dramatic and altogether human story of English life."—*Boston Times.*

"Strong story."—*Chicago Record.*

"It is useless to say that so strong, so fierce a book must be written well."—*Chicago Times-Herald.*

NEW YORK

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

Digitized by Google

12mo, cloth, $1.25

DEFIANT HEARTS

BY

W. HEIMBURG

AUTHOR OF

"My Heart's Darling," "Her Only Brother," "Tales of an Old Castle," Etc., Etc.

"The story is true to life in some of its manifold phases and will repay reading."—*Minneapolis Tribune.*

"It is written in the usual entertaining style of this well known author."—*Boston Courier.*

"Very good reading."—*New Orleans Picayune.*

"The action is vigorous and the story is interesting."—*Public Opinion.*"

"Capital story by an established favorite."—*Philadelphia American.*

"Is a charming German story by the author of "Heart's Darling," "Good Luck," "Her Only Brother," etc."—*Southern Star.*

"It possesses the positive virtue of being pure and wholesome in sentiment."—*Detroit Free Press.*

"It comprises all the many qualities of romance that recommend all Heimburg's other stories."—*New Haven Journal.*

"It is simple, but dignified and free from any of those smirches that suggest the presence of vice and impurity."—*N. Y. Home Journal.*

NEW YORK

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

Digitized by Google

12mo, cloth, $1.25.

"When The World Was Younger"

By M. E. BRADDON

"Miss Braddon skilfully uses as a background the great plague and fire in London, which gives realism to her picture."—*Rochester Herald.*

"The characters are clearly drawn and strongly contrasted. The manners of the times, the intrigues of the court, the landmarks of London, are unerringly painted."—*Boston Times.*

"The first attempt Miss M. E. Braddon has made in the line of the historical novel."—*Literary World.*

"She has chosen the period of the Restoration of Charles the Second for her romance, and has given us an excellent description of the state of society in London and at the Court during the reign of that dissolute monarch."—*Home Queen.*

"It is needless to say that the story is well told."—*San Francisco Chronicle.*

"One of the strongest and most enjoyable of her stories"—*Philadelphia Inquirer.*

"It abounds in mystifying plot, lovable characters, rapid and thrilling incident and delightful descriptions of English scenery."—*Boston Globe.*

"A tale worth reading."—*San Francisco Call.*

"Full of incident, chapter after chapter, brimming with vital meanings."—*Boston Courier.*

"Beautiful, innocent and brave was Angela, the heroine."—*Philadelphia Bulletin.*

"It is a Braddon story in the famous old Braddon vein."—*St. Louis Mirror.*

"This one reviewing the days of Cromwell and the Charles is no shallow piece of work."—*Philadelphia American.*

"Miss Braddon has caught the atmosphere cleverly and manufactured a stirring novel which bears evidence of careful thought and planning."—*Chicago Record.*

"The scene is laid in England in the early days of the Restoration. Charles II., Nell Gwynne, Pepys, and Milton are among the characters."—*Buffalo Express.*

"None of her books tells a more interesting story."—*St. Louis Star.*

K. F. FENNO & COMPANY, New York

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 004554199

Digitized by Google